

Item No.	3
REPORT TITLE	Adoption of the Central Highfields Master Plan October 2025
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Council's endorsement of the Central Highfields Master Plan October 2025 (**Attachment 1**) to guide future development and investment in Central Highfields.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends Council adopt the Central Highfields Master Plan October 2025 (Master Plan 2025) as the strategic framework for land use planning and infrastructure coordination in the Central Highfields precinct. As one of Toowoomba's most significant urban centres, Central Highfields plays an important regional role while maintaining a complementary relationship to the Toowoomba City Centre. The Master Plan 2025 strikes this balance-supporting local investment and service delivery while respecting the city's established primacy as the principal centre for the region.

The updated Master Plan 2025 reflects six (6) years of change and growth in Highfields and has been shaped by both extensive community feedback and rigorous market testing. This dual validation process ensures that the Master Plan 2025 is not only reflective of local aspirations but is also informed by expert economic and development analysis to guide realistic and sustainable implementation.

The Master Plan confirms that the precinct contains ample commercial and retail capacity to meet projected population and employment growth to 2046. The distribution of commercial and civic land has been informed by independent market and economics advice, ensuring that future investment in Highfields complements the broader regional centre hierarchy and supports a vibrant, self-sustaining community hub.

In response to community feedback, the 'low-medium density residential' (in contrast to low density residential) and 'mixed use' areas have been retained. This will introduce a broader mix of housing options, bringing activity, diversity and vibrancy to the heart of Highfields while supporting surrounding retail businesses establishing within the commercial/retail and mixed-use areas.

The Master Plan continues to prioritise high-amenity, civic square, green and connected spaces, with a large district park, which retains existing native vegetation, and opportunities for future memorial and community events are to be explored. All other aspects of the Master Plan were reviewed and remain generally the same as previous master planning, as the purpose/intent are still relevant and achievable.

Other elements were tested and remain in accordance with original planning as the underlying intent of the land remains the same (being for a large centre that supports the whole of Toowoomba's centre hierarchy).

Reflecting demographic trends and a growing, yet ageing population, the Master Plan also provides opportunities for mid-rise health and medical facilities, ensuring that the precinct remains responsive to future service needs.

Council is recommended to adopt the Master Plan (**Attachment 1**) and progress associated actions,

including the Queensland Fire Department (QFD) land transaction and transfer of open space land, to support the sustainable and strategic growth of this key urban centre.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Central Highfields Master Plan October 2025 (**Attachment 1**) as the strategic framework for land use planning and infrastructure coordination to guide future development and investment within the Central Highfields precinct.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The endorsement of the Master Plan 2025 is recommended as it provides a balanced and evidence-based framework to guide future growth of the precinct. As outlined within this report, the Master Plan 2025 meets projected commercial and retail demand supported by independent economic advice, refines areas for low–medium density residential to enhance activity and vibrancy, and delivers high-quality open space and civic square outcomes for the community. Adoption will ensure coordinated infrastructure planning, investment certainty, and alignment with Council's strategic objectives.

CORPORATE PLAN REFERENCE

- 2.4 Continue to pursue active and equitable transport initiatives.
- 2.7 Ongoing advancement and promotion of the Toowoomba Region.
- 2.8 The Uniqueness of our townships and villages throughout the region is understood and valued.

BACKGROUND

Purchase and 2018 Master Plan

Council purchased the 19.69 hectare Central Highfields site in 2017 to support the long-term growth of Highfields as an important northern suburb. The initial Master Plan was adopted in 2018, followed by a more detailed Structure Plan in 2019. In 2022, Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL) was engaged to prepare a divestment strategy to guide future land release and development, endorsed by Council later that year.

Why the Master Plan was updated?

The Master Plan 2025 updates and refines the 2019 Structure Plan to reflect six (6) years of population growth, market evolution, and infrastructure needs. The review process was informed by independent market testing and technical analysis, confirming the commercial feasibility and land use balance required to deliver a vibrant, connected, and sustainable town centre.

The revised Master Plan 2025 responds to the following key drivers:

- **Market Sounding:** JLL undertook market testing of the 2019 Structure Plan in 2024 to assess development feasibility, land use mix, and investor appetite. The findings validated the overall vision but identified opportunities to refine the commercial and residential balance to strengthen economic viability and alignment with community expectations.
- **QFD Facility:** In November 2024, QFD confirmed the need to expand its existing 49 O'Brien Road facility to support 24/7 operations. Following an assessment of 21 potential sites, the preferred location was identified within the Master Plan area. The proposed 3,000m² expansion site is well located, serviced, and free from environmental or physical constraints.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Community consultation was undertaken between January and March 2025 using a range of channels to reach residents, stakeholders, and interest groups. The YourSay platform attracted 7,232 page views from 4,892 unique visitors. A total of 228 submissions were received.

The key themes (with the support and opposed breakdown) are contained in the table below:

Theme	Support	Opposed (Concerns / Issues Raised)
Overall Masterplan	79	29 opposed; 109 unclear or neutral

Environmental / Green Space	70	21 concerns about ongoing maintenance
Fire Station Location	28	18 concerned about traffic and safety
Residential Zoning		53 opposed (density, land use mix)
Commercial / Retail		47 requested additional space or big-box retail
Traffic and Congestion		31 raised concerns about increased traffic volume
Parking		22 highlighted insufficient parking
Transport Hub	39	2 concerns about antisocial behaviour and congestion
Hitzke/Bronwyn Court Link		16 submissions objected (rat-running, safety concerns)
Health Services	21	4 requested more future provision
Civic Plaza and Public Realm	15	18 asked for clearer identification and usage
Walking/Cycling Links	14	Calls for more pedestrian and active transport routes
Housing (Density, Buffers)		Concerns about height, transitions, and interface

ISSUES AND RESPONSES

Summary of Changes

The previous Master Plan has been reviewed (i.e. 2019 Structure Plan) and updated to reflect community feedback, market testing, and infrastructure priorities.

The original intent/vision of the Master Plan was checked and validated throughout the technical assessment and engagement phases and consequently remains largely the same. That is, the site is still envisaged to host a mixed use, commercially focussed precinct supported by residential development on the periphery. Broadly speaking, as a result of this, strategic infrastructure planning recommendations have been reviewed and do not require any further changes.

Notwithstanding the development intent of the land is generally expected to remain consistent with the original Master Plan, key changes and recommendations include:

- Expansion of the community use area (approximately 3,000m²) for the expansion to the QFD station.
- Introduction of a 'Public Transport Node' to better reflect its intended function and integration with local and regional services.
- Expansion of commercial/retail zoned area (to approximately 33,800m²) consistent with the market sounding, community feedback and projected growth. Council has received planning economics advice supporting this outcome.
- Reallocation of low-medium density residential (approximately 31,000m²), enabling more compact residential development whilst creating an appropriate built form interface with surrounding residential areas. Residential activation in close proximity to commercial/retail area in the Master Plan is critical for vibrancy and generating economic activity (e.g. for cafes and shops).
- Expansion of the Mixed-Use area (approximately 27,000m²) to facilitate ground floor activated commercial/retail opportunities and medium density residential offerings above. The mixed-use area in combination with commercial/retail area will provide generous

areas for commercial/retail development to occur for over 20 years and beyond.

- New vehicle access to/from Hitzke Crescent, ensuring low-speed, local connectivity between the southern neighbourhood and town centre.
- New pedestrian connection to/from Bronwyn Court, supporting active transport access into the centre from surrounding residential areas.
- Staging/Phasing plan to reflect early unlocking of catalytic retail/commercial and low-medium density residential opportunities.
- A review and updated to the 'likely uses' tables (for each precinct) to remove land uses which are inconsistent with the outcomes sought for the precinct.

Examples include, removing 'Service Station' and 'low/medium density residential type uses' in the Retail/Commercial precinct and 'Service Industry' and 'Bulk landscaping supplies' in the Mixed Use precinct.

Community Feedback

The following summary highlights how community feedback has directly influenced the updated Master Plan.

What Council heard	How the Master Plan 2025 responds:
QFD expansion	
• Concerns around safety, traffic, and location suitability.	• The QFD site has been confirmed following a detailed site selection process of 21 potential locations. The site selection process was led by the State Government, which required the site to meet statutory and operational requirements for emergency services in the greater Highfields area. • The expansion supports a modern 24/7 emergency service for Highfields. • QFD is required to undertake detailed design, addressing building design, setbacks, landscaping and traffic (during a Ministerial Infrastructure Designation process) to ensure safe, sensitive integration with surrounding uses.
Residential Land Use and Density	
• Concerns about too much residential land and building heights; support for more housing choice.	• Residential land has been refined to 3.1ha, reinstating low-medium density areas that promote housing diversity and bring life and activity to the town centre, in direct response to community feedback. • Residential land uses in close proximity to the town centre will bring vibrancy and life to the Highfields Central site, which will drive further demand for retail development like cafes, restaurants and shops.
Commercial Land Allocation	

Request for more retail space and services to support Highfields' growth.	- The Highfields Chamber of Commerce (HCOC) commissioned a planning economics report in relation to the May 2025 version of the Master Plan. - In response, Council Planning Officers sought additional advice from a planning economist. - The proposed Master Plan incorporates elements from each economist's report/advice and has informed the final commercial/retail response in the Master Plan. - The Master Plan includes 3.38ha of commercial land (an increase compared to the previous Structure Plan), informed by independent market advice and comparable in scale to centres such as Kmart Plaza, South Toowoomba. - It also refines a 2.7ha mixed-use area that combines ground-floor retail and dining with residential or office uses above, encouraging activity throughout the day and night. This approach creates a lively, walkable main street character and provides flexibility for staged development over time. - In considering both the commercial/retail and mixed-use areas in combination within the Master Plan, there is generous land area allocated, in addition to flexibility within the precinct intents, for demand for commercial/retail development well beyond the next 20 years.
Traffic, Access and Parking	
Concerns about congestion and future traffic impacts; desire for better pedestrian links.	- Traffic modelling confirms the network can accommodate projected growth. The Master Plan promotes walkability, active transport links, and high-quality parking design. Broader upgrades will be coordinated through Council's transport planning programs. - Council has also gained funding for the Highfields, Kratzke, O'Brien Roads (HKO) project to upgrade key transport infrastructure adjoining the site. This project will benefit the site but also the broader Highfields community.
Hitzke Crescent Connection and Southern Interface Concerns	
Concerns about new road connections and amenity impacts.	Vehicular and pedestrian links via Hitzke Crescent and Bronwyn Court have been introduced to improve local access and walkability. Design controls will manage amenity, landscaping, and interface with existing neighbourhoods.
Open Space and Environment	

• Requests for more green space and protection of native vegetation.	• The Master Plan reviewed the remaining precincts, such as the open space and civic areas, and they remain generally in accordance with the original intent/purpose of the Master Plan. • The Master Plan retains over 7ha of open space, including a large park, native vegetation, and tree-lined boulevards. Future planning will explore opportunities for memorial and community events. • The Town/Civic Square has also been retained.
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RISK MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Adoption of the Master Plan 2025 provides a clear framework for land use, infrastructure, and staging, aligned with regional growth projections and the new Planning Scheme. It reflects feedback from over 220 submissions and balances competing interests through clear, transparent rationale for key decisions. The Master Plan 2025 supports coordinated infrastructure delivery, including staging and funding pathways through development agreements. Adoption of the Master Plan 2025 provides market certainty and supports Council's future divestment strategy.

LEGAL ISSUES

The following legal considerations apply:

- The Master Plan 2025 in its current form, does not form part of the Toowoomba Region Planning Scheme and therefore cannot regulate development in and of itself.
- Council must ensure the Master Plan 2025 is appropriately referenced in future planning instruments, infrastructure planning, and policy frameworks to maintain its influence.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACT 2019 CONSIDERATIONS

The *Human Rights Act 2019* provides that it is unlawful for a public agency to act or make a decision in a way that is not compatible with human rights, or to fail to give proper consideration to a human right. This necessitates understanding the human rights that are protected. When making decisions or taking actions, consideration needs to be given to how that may impact on a person's human rights. Where there is a restriction on a person's human rights the restriction must be no greater than is justifiable to protect the rights of others or the community at large.

The contents of this Report do not infringe upon the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

DELEGATION

Council Officers do not have delegation to approve the update to the Central Highfields Master Plan.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial or resource implications to endorse the update to the Central Highfields Master Plan. In the future, Council Officers will refine and update the Master Plan 2025's strategy for potential divestment of land.

CONCLUSION

The Master Plan 2025 provides a clear and coordinated framework to guide the sustainable growth and development of one of the Toowoomba Region's growing urban centres. It responds to updated population forecasts, infrastructure needs, and market insights, and has been informed by both independent economic analysis and community feedback.

The Master Plan 2025 achieves a balanced outcome that supports local investment and liveability while complementing Toowoomba City's role as the region's principal centre. It confirms sufficient commercial and retail capacity, enhanced by a flexible mixed-use zone that allows ground-floor retail and dining with residential uses above-creating a vibrant and adaptable town centre.

The Master Plan 2025 refines the low-medium density residential areas, ensuring a diverse housing mix and ongoing activation within the precinct, while the district park, civic square, and preserved native vegetation reinforce Highfields' green and community-focused character.

All other land uses have been tested and remain consistent with previous planning, confirming that the original intent of the precinct remains relevant and achievable. Adoption of the Master Plan 2025 will provide certainty for the community, investors, and service providers, and ensure integration with Council's new Planning Scheme and future infrastructure coordination.

Council is therefore recommended to adopt the Master Plan 2025 and progress the associated actions outlined in this report to support the long-term, sustainable development of the Central Highfields precinct.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Att 1 - Central Highfields Master Plan October 2025