

THE  
*Seven Valleys*<sup>®</sup>

SEVEN VALLEYS  
DESTINATION ACTION PLAN  
2024 – 2030

MAY 2024

*Photo: Glow Worm Tunnel walking track by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services*

The Seven Valleys Destination Action Plan (DAP) was prepared by:

**Destination Marketing Store**



## Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which Lithgow City Council is located, the Wiradjuri Nation, and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing and inherent connection to Country.

Artwork by Rick Slaven

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seven Valleys Destination Action Plan (DAP) embodies a progressive approach to shaping a dynamic and sustainable future for Lithgow and the surrounding region. Central to this vision is a commitment to understanding and catering to the modern traveller, developing a visitor economy that enriches both the economic fabric and the liveability of the region.

At the heart of a sustainable destination is its community. Recognising that robust civic engagement and place planning are keystones to prosperity, the DAP outlines strategies for fostering a vibrant community. This vibrancy not only elevates the resident's quality of life but also transforms the Seven Valleys into an authentic, sustainable destination that beckons to visitors and calls to them to return.

Civic pride is thus dual-purposed, serving as both the pulse of the community and the allure for the visitor. By nurturing this pride, the Seven Valleys can become a destination that is coveted not only as a place to visit but as a cherished community to live, work, and play. Recognising the multiplicative effect of civic pride, the DAP encourages fostering partnerships that resonate with the community's ethos.

The DAP combines insights from local to national strategic frameworks and is underpinned by the formulation of a distinctive place brand. This brand, rooted in community values, will be a cornerstone that engenders civic pride and strikes a chord with target markets on an emotional level, effectively responding to their intrinsic motivations and behaviours.

To stand out in the saturated 'attention economy', marketing strategies need to not only capture but captivate, telling stories that resonate with target markets. This involves crafting inspiring content and leveraging multichannel distribution to amplify the Seven Valleys' narrative. Sustainability and digital transformation are also earmarked as pivotal, ensuring the destination not only thrives but leads by example in adopting forward-thinking strategies.

A key objective will also be to focus on increasing the average length of stay of visitors to the region. Promoting the region's tapestry of landscapes and unique experiences is vital. Uplifting the current 2.3-night stay to the regional average of 3.2 could result in a substantial \$23.6 million economic boost.

The action plan outlines the necessity of a broad, appealing experience offering, highlighting the significance of personalised itineraries and aligning with contemporary consumer behaviour. A thorough review of global and domestic travel trends reveals a surging interest in wellness, outdoor activities, and cultural experiences, underpinning the potential for arts and culture to become a linchpin for growth, especially with the support of the NSW Government's new priorities.

Through the concerted efforts outlined in the Seven Valleys DAP, the region is positioned to foster a thriving and vibrant community, as well as offering visitors a rich, immersive, and diverse array of experiences that satisfy their wants and needs.

**PART A:**

**SETTING THE SCENE**

# INTRODUCTION & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Seven Valleys Destination Action Plan (DAP) is about setting the direction and priorities to **sustainably grow the visitor economy of the local government area (LGA) over the next six years (2024 – 2030)**.

It provides a vision to lead a **practical and prioritised Action Plan** that supports regional promotion, visitation and prosperity while addressing barriers and challenges faced by the region.

The **guiding principles** established for the DAP are:

1. Inclusive of the whole region and all communities
2. Informed - evidence-based
3. Showcasing the destination’s existing and emerging strengths
4. Customer-centric - putting the visitor first
5. Future-focused and sustainable - understanding a dynamic industry and the importance of protecting the destination’s values and attributes
6. Foster collaboration across sectors and between industries and stakeholders
7. Demonstrate leadership through effective implementation, partnerships and communication - including through alignment with NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030
8. Measurable in terms of both deliverables and outcomes

**The DAP has been informed by a comprehensive Situation Analysis, which involved a detailed review of:**

1. **Global and domestic trends that are influencing consumer behaviour in travel**
  - Motivations, interests, preferences, and barriers to travel
  - Future-focused and putting the visitor first (*See Appendix 1 – Adopting a future-focus for Lithgow*)
2. **Visitor research**
  - Influences on travel to the destination over time and as consumer behaviours have evolved
3. **Existing strategies, plans and programs**
  - National, State, regional and local level



## COLLABORATION & ALIGNMENT

A key to success for any destination is to foster and strengthen collaboration and partnerships within the region and beyond its borders.

The information in this DAP is drawn from multiple sources as well as through consultation with the community and industry, including but not limited to:

- Review of existing strategies and plans at the national, State, regional and local levels, including:
  - LCC's Destination Management Plan 2013, Community Strategic Plan 2035, 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement, and Lithgow Evolving Economies Plan (LEEP) and subsequent Emerging Economy Transition Plan 2023
  - Destination Central West NSW's Destination Management Plan 2022 – 2030, Leveraging Visitor Economy Infrastructure Investment report (Nov 2023), Cycle Tourism Opportunities Strategy 2023-2030, Agritourism Development Blueprint and Action Plan (Sep 2023), the Central West and Orana Regional Plan 2041 and the Lithgow Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) – 2023 Update
  - NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 & Commonwealth Government's THRIVE 2030
  - Waterways Plans including, Lake Pillans Restoration Project, Lithgow Water Supply Management Plan, and Lake Wallace Plan of Management
- Visitor research and data, including from Tourism Research Australia (TRA), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
- Relevant and credible global and domestic trends, including from SKIFT Research, Phocuswright, Euromonitor International and Tourism Australia among others

## THE CURRENT DESTINATION LANDSCAPE

There has been several significant public and private investments in the region since 2018. This list is not exhaustive and aims to paint a picture of some of the major investments in the region.

Key public investments have focused on development of the region’s tourism potential, with grant funding playing a key role in the delivery of many of these projects.

Major Private Investments	Est. total project value	Stage of delivery
Maldhan Ngurr Ngurra Lithgow Transformation Hub	Not available	Complete
Black Gold Motel expansion	Not available	Complete
The Foundations, Portland	\$5 million	In Progress
Zig Zag Railway restoration	Not available	Complete
A wide range of enhancements or new tourism developments on private property		

Major Public Investments	Est. total project value	Stage of delivery
Ecotourism investments including the Gardens of Stone and the Wollemi Great Walk	\$50 million	In Progress
Zig Zag Railway restoration	~\$6 million	Complete
Lithgow mountain bike transformation project	\$3.5 million	In Progress
Glow Worm Tunnel precinct upgrades	\$4.1 million	In Progress
Lithgow Main Street revitalisation – Stage 2	\$4.5 million	Due to Start in Early 2024
Great Western Highway upgrades – Katoomba to Lithgow	\$4.5 billion	Not Going Ahead
Portland Foundations Trunk Infrastructure	\$1.5 million	Hasn’t Started
Secret Creek wildlife facilities and native animal hospital, visitor centre and walking track	\$2.5 million	In Progress

## GARDENS OF STONE STATE CONSERVATION AREA (SCA) UPDATE

As the most significant investment in the region, the Gardens of Stone SCA visitor program is well underway with key visitor precincts to be open to the public in late 2024.

While the zipline and via-ferrata proposal is no longer going ahead, the Minister for the Environment has publicly endorsed the Gardens of Stone Multi-Day Walk, an iconic 35km new walking track (forming part of the Wollemi Great Walk), which will support Free & Independent Travellers (FIT market) and guided walks as part of a partnership with Wild Bush Luxury (WBL).

Below is a list of current projects underway:

- Road upgrades are currently underway, with major repairs to Glow Worm Tunnel, Western Boundary and Lost City North now complete. Major repairs to Maiyingu Maragu Trail, Lost City South and Waratah Ridge are set to be complete in 2024, with a schedule of works for secondary roads to be completed to improve access to visitor precincts.
- Construction is now underway on the Lost City Walking Track, a new 5.5km walking track that captures the area's iconic pagoda landscapes, natural and cultural values and historic heritage, including mining infrastructure dating back to the 1920s. The new track is being established by leaders in track design and construction, with completion expected in August 2024. The Lost City precinct will also feature supporting infrastructure including a carpark and facilities, with visitor interpretations to be delivered in 2025.
- Planning is well underway for the Gardens of Stone Multi-Day Walk, with construction to commence within the Gardens of Stone SCA in March 2024. Construction will be delivered in stages, with the first 13km section of track to include connections to Forest Camp – a family campground with facilities, dedicated campsites and day-use-area. Planning is continuing for sections 2-3 of the multi-day walk, with detailed design to be delivered in mid 2024. The visitor experience will be supported by publicly accessible campgrounds.
- NPWS is continuing to work with Wild Bush Luxury (WBL) to progress the Notice of Intent to Lease for three commercial accommodation nodes within the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area. The leases will facilitate the delivery of a guided supported walk to complement the publicly accessible Gardens of Stone Multi-Day Walk. WBL expects to list the Gardens of Stone Multi-Day Walk as part of the Great Walks of Australia program. The level of investment and expertise will be exceptional for Lithgow, attracting high-end visitors for the luxury experience while building awareness for nature-based experiences which are available to the FIT market, including MTB and walking experiences, camping and 4WD tours.
- Planning is continuing for a dedicated 35km single track mountain bike network and 14km dual use track, with environmental surveys to be completed in early 2024 to inform final design and construction planning.

- Work is continuing on the popular Glow Worm Tunnel Visitor precinct, with the Glow Worm Tunnel Walking Track, Pagoda Track and Glow Worm Tunnel upgrade on track for completion in mid 2024. Works include the establishment of a new walking track through the iconic tunnel that is sympathetic to the established glow worm population, in addition to a new carpark, connecting walking tracks and visitor infrastructure.
- Planning is well underway for the Wollemi Great Walk, a 100km+ walking track which connects Lithgow to the Widden Valley, with on-park and off-park accommodation to support diverse visitor experiences. Cycling and walking options will be available. The visitor experience will be delivered in stages, with the first section extending from Lithgow – Glen Davis, the second section from Glen Davis to Ganguddy-Dunns Swamp, and the third section from Ganguddy-Dunns Swamp to Widden Valley.

## OTHER CURRENT & PLANNED INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT LITHGOW'S VISITOR ECONOMY

As well as the public and private investments listed above, other initiatives that support Lithgow's visitor economy include:

Initiative	Description or update as at January 2024
Governance	<p><b>Director, People &amp; Places</b> – this is a new position the has been created for LCC and a Director has recently been appointed to this position.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism now sits under this directorate and is no longer under 'Infrastructure and Economy'</li> <li>• While the Tourism Manager now reports directly to the Director - People and Places, the tourism team will continue to work closely with the Economic Development Team as highlighted below.</li> </ul> <p><b>Events Coordinator</b> – this role is soon to be advertised as part of the Tourism Team.</p> <p><b>Economic Development Manager</b> – this role is being recruited for and will commence shortly. While they will work closely with the Tourism Manager, the role will still sit under the 'Infrastructure and Economy' directorate.</p>
Place Branding	<p>Further consultation has taken place with LCC in regards to developing a place brand and Council is currently considering the opportunity to take this forward as a foundational project identified within this DAP. Further information on place branding is below on page 14.</p>

Initiative	Description or update as at January 2024
ZigZag Railway Activation	<p>ZigZag Railway reopened in October 2023, providing a signature experience for the region and the opportunity to strengthen connectivity across the LGA and more broadly. This precinct activation has already had some great success in attracting large numbers of visitors from diverse backgrounds to the Seven Valleys.</p>
Western Sydney Airport	<p>Construction of Western Sydney International Airport (WSI) is on track to begin operations in 2026. The airport is a transformational infrastructure project that will generate economic activity and provide great opportunities for Lithgow and the surrounding region.</p> <p>The new airport will see large numbers of visitors flying into Western Sydney, with easy access to the Central West and Lithgow. However, this would be hugely improved if the Great Western Highway upgrades – Katoomba to Lithgow – are funded as it would facilitate greater access for new markets.</p> <p>Given that Western Sydney has a high proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and that there will likely be high numbers of visitation from the international visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market into Western Sydney – there is a great opportunity to align the visitor servicing approach of the Seven Valleys to be prepared for international arrivals, including CALD communities.</p>
Wolgan Valley	<p>The Wolgan Valley Association (WVA) and community are working with Council and other relevant agencies to develop a Wolgan Valley specific tourism product/experience that contributes to the community’s lifestyle aspirations, while also delivering sustainable economic input to residents and the broader community.</p> <p>The project has the potential to develop into an extraordinary partnership between public and private landholders to provide wonderful, respectful, low-scale, nature-based tourism experiences in combination with model conservation and educational outcomes.</p> <p>Council engaged DMS to work with the community on the first stages of a product and experience development pathway for the valley. Following this meeting, WVA are looking to do an audit of current resources and interests, as well as have further facilitated meeting with Council and NPWS to discuss possible short, mid, and long-term options and the steps likely to be involved in investigating and progressing those options.</p>
Capertee Valley	<p>A similar approach to the Wolgan Valley is proposed to be delivered with the Capertee Valley.</p>

# KEY INSIGHTS FOR THE SITUATION ANALYSIS

Overall, the Situation Analysis reinforces that:

- After many years of natural disasters - drought, fires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic – Government funding and grant opportunities are being significantly reduced and more competitive. As a result, Return on Investment (ROI) modelling for the visitor economy will require destinations to adopt a laser like focus when it comes to prioritising destination activities.
- A distinctive place brand and positioning statement that builds civic pride and connects to the target market on an emotional level and responds to their motivations, preferences and behaviours will be critical to success.
- Connecting all elements of the experience – from accommodation to tours, attractions, villages, towns, retail and hospitality and other industries – will set the context for delivering on your brand promise in a more meaningful way. The region’s natural and cultural assets and investment in shared infrastructure, such as the Gardens of Stone SCA and ZigZag Railway, can be a core part of the experiential tourism focus of the future.
- Sustainable communities are at the core of sustainable destinations. Building civic pride and vibrancy comes from effective and long-term place planning. This will be critical in developing a thriving visitor economy and a place that people want to live, work and play. (See Appendix 1)
- By considering opportunities across the landscape, destinations can encourage greater dispersal of visitors, reducing impacts on specific sites or locations. This will facilitate the sharing of the benefits of the visitor economy across towns and villages of the LGA while being part of a proactive approach to managing the impacts of unbalanced tourism. The importance of this is further reinforced by the diverse and outstanding natural values of the Lithgow LGA, including the incorporation of parts of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Listing within the LGA.

## AN EMERGING INSIGHT – Arts, Culture & Creative Industries

In December 2023, the NSW Government announced its new **Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy**, which aligns with **REVIVE – Australia’s Cultural Policy** for the next five years (released in January 2023). The policy makes a powerful statement about the strength and vibrancy of our **cultural sector** and is backed by additional funding of **\$286 million over four years from 2023-24**. This new policy direction complements and further enriches the NSW Government’s strong focus on supporting, creating, and promoting memorable, high-quality visitor experiences.

Given the significance of this policy and funding, aligning actions from the DAP with opportunities to enhance culture and vibrancy in Lithgow will be critical.

## CIVIC PRIDE

Perhaps the most prominent insight and theme that arose from the situation analysis and stakeholder consultations was the need to build civic pride.

Civic pride plays a significant role in destination management for several reasons:

1. **Enhancing Local Engagement:** Civic pride encourages residents to be more engaged in maintaining and improving their community. Engaged citizens are more likely to volunteer, participate in local events, and support initiatives that benefit both residents and visitors.
2. **Positive Word-of-Mouth and Reputation Building:** Proud residents often become ambassadors for their city or town. Their positive word-of-mouth can enhance the destination's reputation.
3. **Improving Quality of Life:** A community with a strong sense of civic pride often works towards improving the quality of life for its residents. Better public spaces, cleaner environments, and a focus on sustainable living make the destination more appealing to tourists as well.
4. **Preserving Cultural Heritage and Identity:** When locals take pride in their city or town, they are more inclined to preserve cultural heritage and local traditions. This not only maintains the area's unique character but also offers an authentic experience to visitors.
5. **Encouraging Local Businesses:** Civic pride can stimulate the growth of local businesses, including restaurants, shops, and service providers. This not only supports the local economy but also provides a more diverse, unique and vibrant offering to visitors.
6. **Resilience in Face of Challenges:** Communities with strong civic pride are often more resilient in the face of challenges such as economic downturns or natural disasters. This resilience is crucial for maintaining a consistent and positive visitor experience.

Civic pride contributes to a more vibrant, authentic, and sustainable destination, benefiting both residents and visitors. For these reasons, it will be critical to place focus on building civic pride in the Seven Valleys to create a community that people want to visit and revisit.

# REVIEWING THE SEVEN VALLEYS DESTINATION BRAND TO DEVELOP A WORLD-CLASS PLACE BRAND

LCC's Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2035 identifies the need to "Develop The Seven Valleys Brand" as a key focus area under the theme of 'Strengthening the Economy'. The Lithgow Emerging Economy Plan – 2023 also highlights that ensuring a significant contribution of tourism to future development of the economy largely depends on strategic investments and marketing to create a competitive profile for the region. It also contributes to the LGA's perceived liveability, critical to the success of relocation campaigns and economic growth initiatives.

Stakeholder feedback as well as further consultation with Lithgow City Council (LCC) during the consultation process, has revealed a need to **review 'The Seven Valleys' brand in the context of developing a world-class place brand and brand strategy**. Current challenges facing LCC include:

- The Seven Valleys identity (or logo) is not underpinned by a robust brand strategy, meaning there is no coordinated direction or opportunity to elevate the destination brand and its positioning in the marketplace
- No existing framework around how to use The Seven Valleys identity, both internally and externally – leading to a lack of consistency
- There is a current disconnect between the brand and the tourism businesses who operate in the region, as they have not been taken on the brand journey and are unsure on how to use the brand
- Operators in the region have limited capacity to engage with a place brand, therefore the solution will need to be made simple and accessible for stakeholders to use – such as an open-source brand or elements thereof.

As a key strategic priority, the Seven Valleys requires development of a **place brand** that will meet the aims and needs of both the visitor economy and the broader economy, including attracting investment, new industries, and new residents. This means that the brand strategy will need to consider a broader audience than strictly those who are visiting the region for leisure or visiting friends and relatives (VFR).

The key to developing a new place brand will be to **leverage off the success of the Seven Valleys brand** and **create a brand that the community are proud of**.

It is recommended to **undertake primary consumer research** with both core visitor markets and people who have recently, or are considering, relocating to the region. This will provide invaluable insights to inform a high-quality place brand strategy.

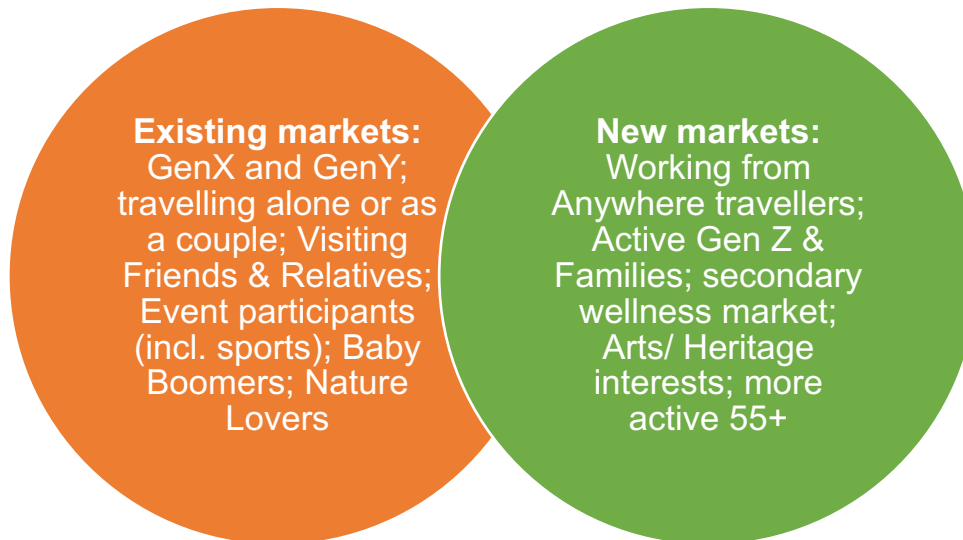
## **SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT**

Another strategic priority in the short-term is optimising owned channels to build the foundations for launching a world-class place brand. A quick competitor analysis in the Situation Analysis revealed there is considerable amount of work that needs to be done to elevate The Seven Valleys identity and positioning.

Effective social media management in the short-term can assist in building the social media platforms' performance and engagement to be better positioned when the new place brand is launched.

## KEY TARGET MARKETS

The strategic approach is to maintain existing markets but also target new higher-value markets.



### High-level objectives

1. Existing markets – strengthen appeal of the destination to existing markets to:
  - a. Extend length of stay
  - b. Encourage repeat visitation
  - c. Increase participation in tours and activities
  - d. Increase regional dispersal (especially during peak periods)
2. New markets – focus on those markets with greatest propensity to grow the visitor economy:
  - a. Increase visitor numbers
  - b. Increase visitation during non-peak periods
  - c. Increase yield (through development of higher-yield products, experiences and accommodation offerings)

As mentioned above under other initiatives supporting the Lithgow visitor economy, the opening of the Western Sydney Airport will also see huge opportunities to attract international arrivals and visitors from CALD communities into the region. Marketing activities and messaging to these target markets will need to consider the perceptions of nature in Australia and associated risks. Diversity of the experience offering, open spaces and free experiences are all fundamental in attracting these new markets into the region.

Understanding the motivations, preferences and interests of your target market segments as well as addressing barriers to travel is critical to success as its about building an understanding of who and why people would be interested in choosing your destination for their holiday or travel.

Demographic market segments can be a useful guide. However, to really understand your target markets, it is important to consider **psychographic profiles** (see section

below on 'Contemporary Market Segments'). This is because not everyone in a demographic market has the same motivations, interests, preferences, or budget. Even in special interest activities, such as mountain biking, we find important differences in the characteristics and behaviours of the market across various segments.

## CONTEMPORARY MARKET SEGMENTS

In November 2022, Tourism Australia released the [Future of Global Tourism Demand](#) report. It is a comprehensive study that:

- Identifies contemporary traveller market segments (by psychographic)
- Highlights the motivations and behaviours of core international markets
- Outlines several themes that will influence the future of travel to and within Australia.

Importantly, many of the insights are **directly relevant to or reflect domestic trends in tourism and travel**, with the research extending beyond core international markets and including the Australian domestic market.

The report identifies seven contemporary traveller market segments (by psychographic). The three market segments most relevant to the Seven Valleys are:

- **Into Nature Traveller:** they want to escape, to feel secure and comfortable, to have a sense of adventure and have a focus on mental and/or physical wellbeing.
- **Exploration Traveller:** is motivated to explore new destinations and to learn and experience new things. This traveller is a key target audience for Indigenous tourism experiences as well as cultural institutions and attractions.
- **Passion/Hobbies Traveller:** have high interest in a singular activity, hobby or passion. Enjoy off-the-beaten-track places and new discoveries.

Travellers will often be a blend of different psychographic segments. However, it is important to start to understand the interests and needs of these different markets.

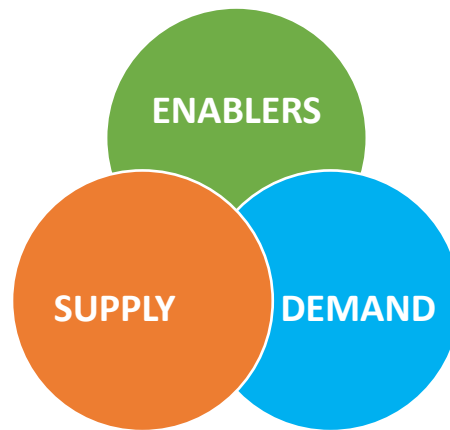
With the abundance of natural resources and recent investment in nature-based assets, it will be important for The Seven Valleys to put increased focus on the **Into-Nature Traveller** segment.

**Exploration Travellers** and **Passion/Hobbies Travellers** will also be key segments to consider given the region's unique industrial heritage and events scene.

**PART B:**

**DAP FRAMEWORK &  
PRIORITY PROJECTS**

# THE DAP FRAMEWORK



**AMBITION:** The Seven Valleys has a strong sense of place, embracing its industrial heritage while offering immersive experiences that benefit the community, visitors and the planet.

**PURPOSE:** Provide a prioritised roadmap for the sustainable growth of the Seven Valleys visitor economy from 2024 - 2030

<b>GOALS</b>	1. Contribute to enhancing social & environmental values (sense of place)	2. Ensure that the visitor economy is viable & vibrant, year round	3. Benefits of the visitor economy are shared across the region (inclusive)
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## HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES

<b>ENABLERS</b>	1. Foster civic pride and a broad base of support for the visitor economy	2. Lead genuine and effective industry engagement	3. Establish a pathway to genuine sustainability at the destination & business level
<b>SUPPLY</b>	1. Enhance existing experiences and events for residents and visitors	2. Attract investment in sustainable, nature and cultural-based tourism experiences, accommodation and hospitality.	3. Attract investment for infrastructure & facilities that deliver shared benefits for residents & visitors
<b>DEMAND</b>	1. Increase awareness and appeal of the Seven Valleys in the marketplace	2. Increase overnight visitor spend	3. Increase regional dispersal and length of stay

## PRIORITISED ACTION PLAN

## AMBITION AND MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

**Ambition:** The Seven Valleys has a strong sense of place, embracing its industrial heritage while offering immersive experiences that benefit the community, visitors and the planet.

**Purpose:** Provide a prioritised roadmap for the sustainable growth of the Seven Valleys visitor economy from 2024 – 2030.

GOALS	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OR OUTPUTS DELIVERED
1. Contribute to enhancing social & environmental values (sense of place)	Foster civic pride and a broad base of support for the visitor economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement a proactive annual communication and local champions program to reinforce the value of the visitor economy to a vibrant destination</li> <li>Implement a VFR campaign to engage residents as part of a more sustainable visitor economy</li> </ul>
	Establish a pathway to genuine sustainability at the destination & business level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15% increase in new sustainable tourism^ experiences and accommodation by 2030</li> <li>30% increase in the number of existing tourism businesses and accommodation providers who complete EcoTourism Australia's Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard (S4SS) program, or achieve sustainable tourism^ accreditation or certification by 2030</li> </ul>
2. Ensure that the visitor economy is viable & vibrant, year-round	Increase awareness and appeal of the Seven Valleys in the marketplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a place brand for Lithgow LGA that encompasses destination branding as well as supporting economic development and growth</li> </ul>

GOALS	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OR OUTPUTS DELIVERED
	Increase overnight visitor spend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of 20%* overnight visitor spend on 2019 across all sub-regions by 2030</li> <li>• Triple international overnight visitors from 2019 (baseline) by 2030 (1% to 3% per TRA data)</li> <li>• Increase in the number of packages and experientially-led touring routes involving existing tourism providers</li> </ul>
	Enhance existing experiences and events for residents and visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of 20% in the number of accommodation providers who are bike-friendly by 2030</li> <li>• Increase of 20% in the number of accommodation providers who offer flexibility work spaces or services by 2030</li> </ul>
	Attract investment (including from the private sector) in sustainable, nature and cultural-based tourism experiences, accommodation and hospitality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of 15% in the number of ATDW-listed experiences, events or attractions by 2030</li> <li>• 3 new First Nations experiences created and operating by 2030</li> </ul>
	Lead genuine and effective industry engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a 12-month rolling calendar of industry capability programs including networking opportunities</li> <li>• Conduct an industry satisfaction survey every second year</li> </ul>
3. Benefits of the visitor economy are shared across	Increase regional dispersal and length of stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase average length of stay from 2.3 nights to 2.8 nights by 2030 – with the</li> </ul>

GOALS	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS OR OUTPUTS DELIVERED
the region (inclusive)		<p>longer-term goal of achieving the NSW regional average of 3.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30% increase in the number of tours/packages/itineraries offered across Lithgow and the LGA</li> </ul>
	Attract investment for infrastructure & facilities that deliver shared benefits for residents & visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract investment for and implement priorities identified within the Community Strategic Plan, Lithgow 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement, and Lithgow Emerging Economy – Transition Plan 2023</li> <li>• Focus on infrastructure and facilities planned but as yet unfunded for significant experiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>*Adjusted for CPI to take account of inflation over the period 2019 – 2030</i></li> <li>• <i>^ Sustainable tourism businesses are defined as those that have achieved appropriate accreditation or certification (e.g. Ecotourism Australia (EA) or Earth Check programs) or completed programs such as EA’s Sustainability Scorecard with a satisfactory rating.</i></li> </ul>		

# 1. ENABLERS FOR SUCCESS

## ENABLERS

HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES			
<b>ENABLERS</b>	1. Foster civic pride and a broad base of support for the visitor economy	2. Lead genuine and effective industry engagement	3. Establish a pathway to genuine sustainability at the destination & business level

The foundation of the Seven Valleys DAP's achievement lies in its commitment to staying informed, visitor-centric and future-focused. Sustainability, as well as Technology and Digital Transformation will also play a crucial role in building a thriving destination (See Appendix 1 – Adopting a future-focus for Lithgow). Equally vital is fostering civic pride, partnerships and recognising the role of the visitor economy as a key element in enhancing economic vitality and liveability.

Given the ever-changing nature of tourism, it is crucial to understand the preferences, expectations and needs of contemporary travellers, as well as their barriers to travel. It's also important to recognise that sometimes the little things make the biggest difference.

The enablers, while inter-related, have been broadly grouped into the key strategies below:

Strategies	Priority Actions
1.1. Foster civic pride and a broad base of support for the visitor economy with residents and local businesses, as well as across all areas of Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Implement a proactive, annual communication program with residents and businesses to facilitate a more positive understanding of the value of the visitor economy to the region                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the Business Chambers, community groups and local organisations from across the region</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. Identify local champions who can support and communicate the benefits of the visitor economy to the LGA                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is recommended to establish an Industry Advisory Group for a 2-year term (initially). A clear Terms of Reference and selection process should be determined to form the group.</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Implement a VFR campaign to engage residents as part of a more sustainable visitor economy (see 3.4 below)</li> </ul>

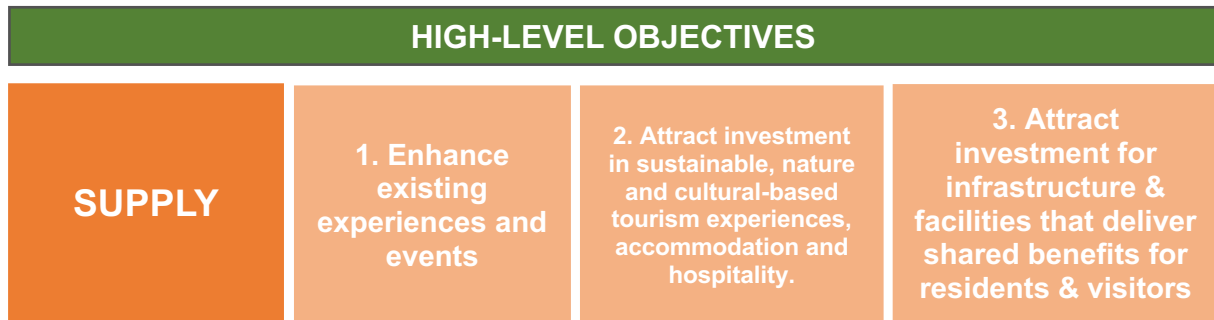
Strategies	Priority Actions
<p>1.2. Lead and facilitate genuine and effective industry engagement</p>	<p>Develop and implement a shared engagement and capacity development program, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Dedicated industry engagement and regular communication program, including but not limited: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrates progress updates on implementation of the Seven Valleys DAP.</li> <li>• Opportunities for networking and sharing of information, ideas and initiatives.</li> <li>• Sharing insights from research and trend analysis – see 1.2 (v) below.</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. 12-month rolling calendar of industry capability development programs, workshops, seminars, etc in which industry can participate to build their capabilities and network with industry colleagues – address experience and event development, delivery and marketing – link to programs delivered by other organisations and agencies, including Destination Central West NSW (DCW NSW) and DNSW’s NSW First, Get Connected and export-readiness programs – refer 2.1 below</li> <li>iii. Work with industry, tourism operators and event owners to identify specific issues or challenges that LCC can advocate for or represent industry, especially with other levels of Government i.e. State and Commonwealth agencies</li> <li>iv. Familiarisation programs with operators and other sectors to encourage increased collaboration, partnerships, and packaging of experiences, products and services, including ancillary services such as transport.</li> <li>v. Implement a regular visitor research program to provide meaningful insights into the LGA’s visitor economy and the dynamic and evolving nature of consumer behaviour in tourism, travel and events, including sentiment analysis and event evaluation – this can be shared with the LGA’s industry to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase industry awareness of consumer behavior and expectations, especially with regard to online and digital services and e-commerce</li> <li>• Encourage adoption of technology to promote the region and provide contemporary visitor services at all touch points along the customer journey</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understand the value of events and utilise this information to enable future support for events</li> </ul>
<p>1.3. Establish a pathway to genuine sustainability at the destination &amp; business level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Encouraging more operators to achieve sustainable accreditation, potentially by starting with the Strive 4 Sustainability – a joint Tourism Australia and Ecotourism Australia program</li> <li>ii. LCC to conduct monitoring of tourism impacts, particularly at a site-specific level, to inform future mitigation strategies that address potential impacts from unbalanced tourism</li> </ul>
<p>1.4. Collaboration within and across LGA boundaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Continue regular communication with surrounding LGAs, Commonwealth and State Government agencies and DCW NSW</li> <li>ii. Identify a small number of projects (for example, mountain biking and cycle tourism, agritourism trails or hiking trails) to start building itineraries and demonstrating greater collaboration between local government areas in the Central West - in line with the Regional Priorities from the Destination Central West NSW DMP</li> </ul>
<p>1.5. Tourism Delivery Model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Commence a review of and confirm delivery structure arrangements as a high priority. Commence by defining the objectives and outcomes required for the delivery model to determine the most suitable, appropriate and effective model for the Seven Valleys, including roles and responsibilities and potential use of outsourced services.</li> </ul>
<p>1.6. Foster and facilitate a strategic approach to attracting investment and talent, including grant funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. LCC should monitor and provide advice and support to local businesses, organisations and community or volunteer groups to apply for visitor economy or other grants that can assist them to grow, revitalise or enhance their experience or offering, including for events. This involves ongoing liaison with DCW NSW as the key regional partner and conduit to DNSW, Department of Regional NSW and other agencies</li> <li>ii. Identify cross-boundary infrastructure projects that enhance experiences in Central West NSW. Ensure customer-centric design and the costs associated with attracting investment are built into all proposals for new major projects. This includes robust master planning, feasibility and return on investment analysis</li> </ul>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iii. As part of the industry engagement program, share insights into best practice workforce strategies with industry to shift focus on to the quality of the employee and invest in their ability to grow and learn to create meaningful career pathways</li> </ul>
1.7. Place and Precinct Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. LCC should continue to review the Council's development and planning framework to encourage tourism development through initiatives such as re-zoning land for agritourism purposes or simplifying the process for tourism DAs or complying development</li> <li>ii. Develop an Accommodation and Housing Strategy as a high priority to address accommodation supply, housing affordability and staff shortages (while not a specific action of the visitor economy, it is essential to proactively address both housing and accommodation supply in line with temporary and longer-term or more permanent uses)</li> <li>iii. Support and continue to invest in the shift in new industries for the region that provide benefits to the local economy, visitors and the environment</li> <li>iv. Continue to develop master and place planning for Main Street and surrounding precincts to engender civic pride and strengthen a sense of vibrancy</li> </ul>

## 2. SUPPLY: EXPERIENCE OFFERING

SUPPLY



A broad experience offering that appeals to a range of target markets would enable the Seven Valleys to realise an even greater potential from its visitor economy. This involves, among other things:

- Experience-led itineraries that support and reinforce the destination's positioning
- Consider the influence of contemporary consumer behaviour on travel, including the motivations, expectations and barriers to travel as well as for events, attractions and other leisure activities
- Balance between hero and supporting experiences, including events

A detailed review of global and domestic trends in travel, which is included in the Situation Analysis, highlights the growing importance of wellness tourism, nature-based and outdoor activities (including special interests such as mountain biking), cultural tourism, sustainability, quality food and drink, events and more immersive and personalised small group experiences. In line with the NSW Government's new priorities and policy direction, a further area of growth potential relates to the arts and culture sector. Developing new or enhancing existing experiences in this sector will be critical to success and could include workshops and masterclasses, from visual arts to music and more.

Initiatives such as new experience-led trails and itineraries that respond to these interests, expectations and motivations of the domestic market (in particular) are of value to the region along with the promotion, packaging and/or development of existing or new products and experiences. This is also important for building awareness and the appeal of the Seven Valleys for international markets, especially but not exclusively the FIT and VFR markets.

The priorities outlined below will contribute to enriching the experience offering, provide more reasons for visitors to extend their stay, spend more (growing yield) and encourage regional dispersal across the LGA.

Strategies	Priority Actions
2.1. Implement a product and experience development program	<p>i. Implement an experience and product development program as part of a broader annual industry capability development program focused on enhancing existing and developing new experiences, products, accommodation and events. Include consideration of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialist program for encouraging the development of new or enhancing existing Wiradjuri cultural experiences</li> <li>• Program for accommodation providers to leverage the ‘working from anywhere’ market</li> <li>• Building upon the region’s rail assets and the profile of rail tourism</li> <li>• New or emerging arts and cultural experiences</li> <li>• Elevating nature-based and special interest activities, including bird watching, rock climbing, as well as recreational boating and fishing</li> <li>• Specialist program relating to mountain biking to encourage an increase in the number of bike friendly businesses (and other cycling and cycle tourism opportunities such as gravel riding)</li> <li>• Experience packaging, bundling and multi-day itinerary development to meet the needs of difference target market segments and to better support events</li> <li>• Revitalisation of existing accommodation and hospitality as well as encouraging the increased use of local produce</li> <li>• Addressing the needs of accessible tourism as well as supporting and inspiring culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to visit</li> <li>• Addressing the needs of more pet-friendly accommodation and experiences</li> <li>• Growing the listing of products on the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW), including through linking with Destination NSW’s programs such as <i>NSW First</i> and <i>Get Connected</i> as well as encouraging more operators to become export-ready and listed with Online Travel Agents (OTAs), including experiences &amp; tours</li> </ul> <p>ii. Encourage an increase in the supply and diversity of sustainable tourism, including eco-accredited accommodation, experiences and products</p>
2.2. Events & Industrial Heritage Sites	<p>i. Create an Events Strategy that supports existing major events and their potential expansion, as well as supporting smaller scale and community events.</p>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. Develop an events prospectus to attract event organisers to the region – both large scale and smaller boutique and business events</li> <li>iii. Develop a unified events calendar for the LGA that is linked with a regional events calendar to give oversight of activities across the region and to enable product and experience bundling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating cycling events (mountain bike, road and gravel) especially to help activate the recent investment in the Lithgow mountain bike transformation project</li> </ul> </li> <li>iv. Conduct an audit of industrial heritage sites and buildings that can be repurposed and activated (adaptive reuse) through things such as events</li> </ul>
<p>2.3. Attract investment for infrastructure and facilities that deliver shared benefits for residents and visitors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Implement a prioritised infrastructure improvements schedule, underpinned by place planning, to improve road access across the region and further develop tourism assets (e.g. access to Wolgan and Capertee Valley should be a high priority)</li> <li>ii. Attract investment for and implement priorities identified within the Community Strategic Plan, Lithgow 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement, and Lithgow Emerging Economy – Transition Plan 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may include support for new or emerging arts and cultural experiences such as the revitalisation of Union Theatre or the Lithgow Cultural Precinct and History Avenue among others</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Focus on infrastructure and facilities planned but as yet unfunded for significant experiences</li> <li>iv. Attract investment for accommodation suppliers as part of the Accommodation and Housing Strategy for the LGA</li> <li>v. Identify and prioritise connectivity with core features of the destination, including towns and villages and all elements of the experience - from accommodation to tours, attractions, retail and hospitality through to amenities and services such as parking, toilets and bike hire</li> </ul>
<p>2.4. Enhanced focus on culinary and agri-tourism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Develop a strategic approach to supporting culinary and agritourism across the LGA, particularly in context of broader land use planning, zoning and reforms to the NSW Government’s agritourism policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure both the agricultural industry are involved along with the hospitality sector</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify priorities for place activation planning, experience development, events, packaging and marketing, etc.</li> </ul>
<p>2.5. Game changer projects for the region – subject to available resources, completing business cases and feasibility studies and attracting investment from public or private sources and/or public-private partnership (PPP) opportunities</p> <p><i>Consider opportunities for grant programs such as the Commonwealth Government's <a href="#">Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program</a> and <a href="#">NSW Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy</a></i></p>	<p>Subject to available resources, longer-term game-changer projects for the LGA include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress the development, maintenance and ongoing enhancement of the mountain bike trail network and facilities in the State Mine Heritage Park and GOS SCA – include connectivity of trails into Lithgow City and across the LGA more broadly to enable and improve access for other forms of cycle tourism, including gravel bikes</li> <li>Explore alternative locations and funding opportunities for the via ferrata, zipline and other signature nature-based experiences previously proposed for the GOS SCA</li> <li>Revitalisation of the Union Theatre as a key tourism asset for bringing arts and cultural performances and shows to the LGA</li> <li>Revitalisation of the Lithgow's Culture Precinct/History Avenue in line with the NSW Governments focus on improving cultural and creative industries</li> <li>Great Western Highway upgrades – Katoomba to Lithgow – continue to support upgrades and seek funding as this would significantly improve connectivity and accessibility across the landscape for new and emerging markets</li> <li>Further leveraging rail tourism across the region – capitalising on experiences such as the heritage rail trial, ZigZag Railway and potential for a Bathurst Bullet pub tour</li> <li>Development of The Foundations Portland, providing housing solutions and an arts and culture precinct</li> <li>Access to Wolgan Valley, the reopening of Emirates One&amp;Only Resort and the continued support of the Wolgan Valley Association to achieve their community's aspirations for sustainable product and experience development</li> <li>Working to establish continual support for the Capertee Valley</li> <li>Support other significant visitor-related projects on lands managed by NSW Government agencies, including NPWS, Forestry Corporation and Crown Lands NSW, especially to enable connectivity at a landscape-scale.</li> </ol>

### 3. DEMAND: MARKETING & VISITOR SERVICES

DEMAND

#### HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES

DEMAND

1. Increase awareness and appeal of the Seven Valleys in the marketplace

2. Increase overnight visitor spend

3. Increase regional dispersal and length of stay

Marketing competes in the ‘attention economy’, a place where people ignore the ordinary. Job number one is getting noticed. To do this, marketing needs to tell a story. A story that makes a destination outstanding at standing-out.

It is critical to ensure that the approach involves:

- First and foremost, ensuring that the destination or place brand and positioning resonate with your target markets and your community and industry.
- Focus on your target markets - Too often, destinations try to be everything to everybody, which is ineffective and costly. Narrow the focus on your target markets and ensure that you use the right channels to reach them.
  - Commence by creating target market personas based on motivations, expectations, pain points and barriers to travel as well as the most effective channels to reach them
- Remarkable content, including videos, images, copy and inspiring itineraries that:
  - Bring the Seven Valleys stories, characters and landscape to life by ‘pulling on the heart strings’ (inspirational content)
  - Provide high quality information to assist visitors plan, book and enjoy their trip (informational or rational content)
  - Enable multichannel distribution, including through third-party channels such as DNSW, Online Travel Agents (OTAs), NPWS and Tourism Australia and to support public relations (PR)
- Leverage and cross-promote marketing activities undertaken for the NSW Central West, including by Destination NSW.

Marketing the region’s diverse landscapes, towns/villages and experiences will also be key, showcasing that the Seven Valleys is more than just Lithgow. Capertee Valley, Portland, Wallerawang, Kanimbla Valley and other key areas have distinct tourism offerings that will help shape the new place brand.

A key objective will also be to focus on increasing the average length of stay of visitors to the region.

Currently Lithgow’s average length of stay is 2.3 nights, which is a conservative number given we know this figure includes a large number of workers who stay in-region during the week for infrastructure projects (rather than for tourism purposes). This is significantly below the average length of stay of visitors to regional NSW, which currently sits at about 3.2 nights.

Put simply, if Lithgow LGA was to increase its average length of stay from 2.3 nights to 3.2 nights (the regional NSW average), there would be an **additional injection of approximately \$23.6 million into the local economy**.

Strategies	Priority Actions
<p>3.1. Review the Seven Valleys destination brand to develop a new place brand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Review the Seven Valleys destination brand to develop a new place brand, leveraging core insights into the target market segments to create a stronger emotional connection with them. This will also position the Seven Valleys as a destination in its own right, and not a just a ‘gateway to the Central West.’ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importantly, a high-quality place brand strategy, positioning and identity would provide the framework and guide destination marketing, efforts to grow the visitor economy, enable investment attraction and support economic development.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>3.2. Create a destination marketing plan to guide all marketing and marketing-communication activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Develop a multi-year marketing plan (three-year), underpinned by a new place brand, to guide marketing campaigns, content creation, and other activities across owned, earned, and paid channels to reach the target market segments. It should specifically (but not exclusively) include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevating the place brand in a way that strongly resonates with and appeals to the target audience.</li> <li>• Raising awareness and appeal of the extensive trails network of the region, from nature-based trails to arts and heritage trails.</li> <li>• Profile major projects, such as the Gardens of Stone Conservation Area investments, ZigZag Railway upgrades and the Lithgow mountain bike transformation project.</li> <li>• Major events in the annual events calendar</li> <li>• Other primary experience themes, including the arts, heritage, culture and attractions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. Identify and focus on priority target markets, including special-interest markets, such as for mountain biking, rail tourism and industrial heritage enthusiasts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create target market personas based on motivations, expectations, pain points and barriers to travel as well as channels to reach them</li> <li>• Identify domestic and international market segments with the highest propensity to travel to the LGA. International market segmentation should focus on the FIT (Free &amp; Independent Traveller) and VFR markets as well as partnership opportunities, recognising the dynamic environment</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Identify a balance between owned, earned and paid channels - leverage industry (including local industry) and third-party channels through cross-referencing and sharing content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate a proactive PR program in collaboration with DNSW</li> <li>• Guide a program of 'always on' or evergreen content</li> </ul> </li> <li>iv. Integrate consideration of a multi-year marketing campaign, underpinned by the brand and guided by a campaign strategy and idea that resonates with the target market for Seven Valleys, which can be activated across all channels and touch points in the customer journey and guide content creation</li> <li>v. Integrate opportunities for collaboration with surrounding LGAs and experiences, such as road trip itineraries and hiking or biking trails</li> <li>vi. Align with the evolving experience offering of the LGA, including celebrating the opening of new visitor-related infrastructure or the revitalisation of existing attractions. These should also be a focus for public relations (PR)</li> </ul>
<p>3.3. Elevate visitor servicing across the LGA - increasing visitor dispersal and length of stay</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Consider the visitor servicing needs and optimise channels to best reach target market audiences at the right stages along the customer or visitor journey and maximise visitor yield. This should include creating remarkable content for multichannel distribution, including but not limited to compelling itinerary packaging tailored to audience desires</li> <li>ii. Prioritise social media management and creating engaging content that starts to shift the negative perceptions of Lithgow and builds the foundations for</li> </ul>

Strategies	Priority Actions
	<p>an engaged audience once the place brand and marketing plan are complete. Consider external support to get all channels humming</p>
<p>3.4. Targeted approach to attracting the VFR market</p>	<p>i. Implement a hyper-local campaign to activate residents to invite their friends and relatives (VFR market) to visit. The VFR market is already important to the LGA. It is also more likely to visit outside of peak season and contribute to a more sustainable visitor economy, year-round</p>
<p>3.5. Increase overnight visitor spend</p>	<p>i. Work with existing tourism operators to increase the number of packages, itineraries and experientially-led touring routes</p> <p>ii. Develop high-quality experiences that attract new high-yield and low-volume visitors (diversifying the experience offering and attracting new market segments)</p>

**PART C:**

**PRIORITISED ACTION  
PLAN**

# PRIORTISED ACTION PLAN

The **Seven Valleys Destination Action Plan (DAP)** identifies and details the strategies and actions included in the table below. The table only provides a brief outline of the strategies and action and should be read in conjunction with the Seven Valleys DAP for context and rationale.

The **Prioritised Action Plan** prioritises the strategies and action in line with the three phases of the **NSW Visitor Economy Plan 2030**, which also aligns with the **Destination Central West NSW Destination Management Plan (DMP)**. It identifies an indicative timeframe for achieving core deliverables, assigns high-level responsibilities and highlights primary linkages to facilitate implementation. **It is subject to availability of resources** (both human and financial) and an **appropriate governance model**.

The Seven Valleys DAP is a **whole-of-Council plan** with significant opportunities to engage stakeholders, industry, and the community.

**Phases aligned to the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030** (except for phase 4, Game Changer projects):

1. **Recovery: 2024** (High priority) – this phase includes those actions that are **ongoing** throughout the duration of the DAP as well as those that aren't time specific
2. **Momentum: 2025 – 2026** (Medium-term priority)
3. **Accelerate: 2027 – 2030** (Longer-term priority) - Subject to an annual review and evaluation of the DAP – Priority Action Plan to be updated in the context of available resources and emerging or incomplete priorities over the previous phases (2024 – 2030 inclusive)
4. **Game-changer projects**: these projects require more detailed planning and resources, as a result they aren't allocated a specific timeframe for implementation.

## Acronyms used:

- CLNSW – Crown Lands NSW
- DCNSW – Destination Central West NSW
- DNSW – Destination NSW
- DRNSW – Department of Regional NSW
- LCC – Lithgow City Council
- FCNSW – Forestry Corporation NSW (State Forests)
- FY – Financial Year
- LALCs – Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- NPWS – NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service
- VES – NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030

## Key to the table below:

- E – Enablers for Success (shaded green)
- S – Supply: Quality Experiences (shaded orange)
- D – Demand: Marketing & Visitor Services (shaded blue)

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
VES PHASE: RECOVERY 2024 (High priority) - includes ongoing actions				
1.1	Foster civic pride and a broad base of support for the visitor economy with residents and local businesses, as well as across all areas of Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Implement a <b>proactive, annual communication program</b> with residents and businesses to facilitate a more positive understanding of the value of the visitor economy to the region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the Business Chambers, community groups and local organisations from across the region</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. Identify local champions who can support and communicate the benefits of the visitor economy to the LGA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is recommended to establish an Industry Advisory Group for a 2-year term (initially). A clear Terms of Reference and selection process should be determined to form the group.</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Implement a VFR campaign to engage residents as part of a more sustainable visitor economy (see 3.4 below)</li> </ul>	– 2024 then ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC-Lead subject to &amp; in collaboration with ongoing governance arrangements (per 1.5 below)</li> <li>– Involve the Business Chambers, community groups and local organisations</li> <li>– Identify local champions who can support and communicate the benefits of the visitor economy to the LGA</li> </ul>
1.2	Lead and facilitate genuine and effective industry engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Develop and implement a <b>shared engagement and capacity development program</b>, including a <b>regular visitor research program</b> to provide meaningful insights into the LGA's visitor economy and the dynamic and evolving nature of consumer behaviour in tourism, travel and events (Refer to DAP for detailed Actions i. – v. inclusive)</li> </ul>	– 2024 then ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC-lead subject to &amp; in collaboration with ongoing governance arrangements</li> <li>– Involve industry</li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
1.5	Tourism delivery model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Commence a review of and confirm delivery structure arrangements as a high priority. Commence by defining the objectives and outcomes required for the delivery model to determine the most suitable, appropriate and effective model for the Seven Valleys, including roles and responsibilities and potential use of outsourced services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>High Priority</b> – 2<sup>nd</sup> QTR 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> </ul>
2.2	Events & Industrial Heritage Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Create an Events Strategy that supports existing major events and their potential expansion, as well as supporting smaller scale and community events.</li> <li>ii. Develop an events prospectus to attract event organisers to the region – both large scale and smaller boutique and business events</li> <li>iii. Develop a unified events calendar for the LGA that is linked with a regional events calendar to give oversight of activities across the region and to enable product and experience bundling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating mountain bike events, especially to help activate the recent investment in the Lithgow mountain bike transformation project</li> </ul> </li> <li>iv. Conduct an audit of industrial heritage sites and buildings that can be repurposed and activated (adaptive reuse) through things such as events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Commence 2<sup>nd</sup> half 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involvement of the Industry Advisory Group &amp; industry stakeholders</li> <li>– DCWNSW &amp; DNSW</li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
3.1	Review the Seven Valleys destination brand to develop a new place brand	<p>i. Review the Seven Valleys destination brand to <b>develop a new place brand</b>, leveraging core insights into the target market segments to create a stronger emotional connection with them. This will also position the Seven Valleys as a destination in its own right, and not a just a 'gateway to the Central West.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importantly, a high-quality place brand strategy, positioning and identity would provide the framework and guide destination marketing, efforts to grow the visitor economy, enable investment attraction and support economic development.</li> </ul>	– <b>High Priority</b> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> QTR 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LCC lead</li> <li><i>Involve industry &amp; key stakeholders through engagement &amp; consultation</i></li> </ul>
3.2	Create a destination marketing plan to guide all marketing and marketing-communication activities	<p>i. Develop a <b>multi-year marketing plan (three-year)</b> to guide marketing campaigns, content creation, and other activities across owned, earned, and paid channels to reach the target market segments (Refer to DAP for detailed Actions i. – vi. inclusive)</p>	– <b>High Priority</b> in line with brand strategy – 2 <sup>nd</sup> QTR 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LCC lead</li> <li><i>Involve industry &amp; key stakeholders through engagement &amp; consultation</i></li> </ul>
3.3	Elevate visitor servicing across the LGA - increasing visitor dispersal and length of stay	<p>ii. Prioritise social media management and creating engaging content that starts to shift the negative perceptions of Lithgow and builds the foundations for an engaged audience once the place brand and marketing plan are complete.</p>	– <b>High Priority</b> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> QTR 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LCC lead subject to potential outsourced externally support</li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
3.5	Increase overnight visitor spend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Work with existing tourism operators to increase the number of packages, itineraries and experientially-led touring routes involving</li> <li>ii. Develop high-quality experiences that attract new high-yield and low-volume visitors (diversifying the experience offering and attracting new market segments)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>High Priority</b> – 2<sup>nd</sup> half 2024</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involvement of the Industry Advisory Group &amp; industry stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>ONGOING &amp; NON-TIME SPECIFIC ACTIONS</b>				
1.4	Collaboration within and across LGA boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Continue regular communication with surrounding LGAs, Commonwealth and State Government agencies and DCW NSW</li> <li>ii. Identify a small number of projects (for example, mountain biking and cycle tourism, agritourism trails or hiking trails) to start building itineraries and demonstrating greater collaboration between local government areas in the Central West - in line with the Regional Priorities from the Destination Central West NSW DMP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Key stakeholders identified, including surrounding LGAs, DCWNSW, DNSW, DRNSW, NPWS, FCNSW, CLNSW, Traditional Owners, LALCs, among others</li> </ul>
1.6	Foster and facilitate a strategic approach to attracting investment and talent, including grant funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. LCC should monitor and provide advice and support to local businesses, organisations and community or volunteer groups to apply for visitor economy or other grants that can assist them to grow, revitalise or enhance their experience or offering, including for events. This involves ongoing liaison with DCW NSW as the key regional partner and conduit to DNSW, Department of Regional NSW and other agencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involve the Industry Advisory Group</li> <li>– Ongoing liaison with DCWNSW, DNSW, DRNSW and other government agencies</li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. Identify cross-boundary infrastructure projects that enhance experiences in Central West NSW. Ensure customer-centric design and the costs associated with attracting investment are built into all proposals for new major projects. This includes robust master planning, feasibility and return on investment analysis</li> <li>iii. As part of the industry engagement program, share insights into best practice workforce strategies with industry to shift focus on to the quality of the employee and invest in their ability to grow and learn to create meaningful career pathways</li> </ul>		
1.7	Place and Precinct Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. LCC should continue to review the Council’s development and planning framework to encourage tourism development through initiatives such as re-zoning land for agritourism purposes or simplifying the process for tourism DAs or complying development</li> <li>iii. Support and continue to invest in the shift in new industries for the region that provide benefits to the local economy, visitors and the environment</li> <li>iv. Continue to develop master and place planning for Main Street and surrounding precincts to engender civic pride and strengthen a sense of vibrancy</li> </ul>	– Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involvement of the Industry Advisory Group &amp; industry stakeholders (as required)</li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
2.1	Implement a product and experience development program	ii. Encourage an increase in the supply and diversity of <b>sustainable tourism</b> , including eco-accredited accommodation, experiences and products	– Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involve industry</li> <li>– Ecotourism Australia &amp; similar organisations such as EarthCheck</li> </ul>
2.3	Attract investment for infrastructure and facilities that deliver shared benefits for residents and visitors	ii. Attract investment for and implement priorities identified within the Community Strategic Plan, Lithgow 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement, and Lithgow Emerging Economy – Transition Plan 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may include support for new or emerging arts and cultural experiences such as the revitalisation of Union Theatre or the Lithgow Cultural Precinct and History Avenue among others</li> </ul> iii. Focus on infrastructure and facilities planned but as yet unfunded for significant experiences iv. Attract investment for accommodation suppliers as part of the Accommodation and Housing Strategy for the LGA v. Identify and prioritise connectivity with core features of the destination, including towns and villages and all elements of the experience - from accommodation to tours, attractions, retail and hospitality through to amenities and services such as parking, toilets and bike hire	– Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Links to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Lithgow 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement</li> <li>• Lithgow Emerging Economy – Transition Plan 2023</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
3.3	Elevate visitor servicing across the LGA - increasing visitor dispersal and length of stay	i. Consider the visitor servicing needs and optimise channels to best reach target market audiences at the right stages along the customer or visitor journey and maximise visitor yield. This should include creating remarkable content for multichannel distribution, including but not limited to compelling itinerary packaging tailored to audience desires	- Ongoing	- LCC lead - Industry Advisory Group - Involve industry
3.4	Targeted approach to attracting the VFR market	i. Implement a hyper-local campaign to activate residents to invite their friends and relatives (VFR market) to visit	- Implemented as part of the brand roll-out	- LCC lead
<b>VES PHASE: MOMENTUM 2025 – 2026 (Medium-term priority)</b>				
1.3	Establish a pathway to genuine sustainability at the destination & business level	i. Encouraging more operators to achieve sustainable accreditation, potentially by starting with the Strive 4 Sustainability – a joint Tourism Australia and Ecotourism Australia program ii. LCC to conduct monitoring of tourism impacts, particularly at a site-specific level, to inform future mitigation strategies that address potential impacts from unbalanced tourism	- Early 2025 then ongoing	- LCC lead - Ecotourism Australia and/or EarthCheck
1.7	Place and Precinct Planning	iii. Develop an Accommodation and Housing Strategy as a high priority to address accommodation supply, housing affordability and staff shortages	- Early 2025	- LCC lead

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
2.1	Implement a product and experience development program	i. Implement an <b>product and experience development program</b> as part of a broader annual industry capability development program focused on enhancing existing and developing new experiences, products, accommodation and events (Refer to DAP for detailed Actions)	– Early 2025 then ongoing annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead subject to &amp; in collaboration with ongoing governance arrangements</li> <li>– Industry Advisory Group</li> <li>– Ongoing liaison with DCWNSW &amp; DNSW</li> </ul>
2.3	Attract investment for infrastructure and facilities that deliver shared benefits for residents and visitors	i. Implement a prioritised infrastructure improvements schedule, underpinned by place planning, to improve road access across the region and further develop tourism assets (e.g. access to Wolgan and Capertee Valley should be a high priority)	– Early 2025	– LCC lead
2.4	Enhanced focus on culinary and agri-tourism	iii. Develop a <b>strategic approach</b> to supporting culinary and agritourism across the LGA (Refer to DAP for more detail)	– Late 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– LCC lead</li> <li>– Involve the Industry Advisory Group and broader industry</li> <li>– DCWNSW &amp; DNSW</li> </ul>
<b>VES PHASE: ACCELERATE: 2027 – 2030 (Longer-term priority)</b>				
Subject to an annual review and evaluation of The Seven Valleys DAP – Priority Action Plan to be updated in the context of available resources and emerging or incomplete priorities over the previous phases (2024 – 2030 inclusive)				
<b>GAME CHANGER PROJECTS – Timing subject to availability of resources (human &amp; financial), attracting investment as well as robust and credible planning processes &amp; feasibility assessments</b>				
2.5		i. Progress the development, maintenance and ongoing enhancement of the mountain		– ESC lead

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
	<p><b>Game changer projects for the region</b></p> <p><i>Subject to available resources, completing business cases and feasibility studies and attracting investment from public or private sources and/or public-private partnership (PPP) opportunities</i></p> <p><b>Consider opportunities for grant programs such as the Commonwealth Government's <a href="#">Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program</a> and <a href="#">NSW Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy</a></b></p>	<p>bike trail network and facilities in the State Mine Heritage Park and GOS SCA – include connectivity of trails into Lithgow City and across the LGA more broadly to enable and improve access for other forms of cycle tourism, including gravel bikes</p> <p>ii. Explore alternative locations and funding opportunities for the via ferrata, zipline and other signature nature-based experiences previously proposed for the GOS SCA</p> <p>iii. Revitalisation of the Union Theatre as a key tourism asset for bringing arts and cultural performances and shows to the LGA</p> <p>iv. Revitalisation of the Lithgow's Culture Precinct/History Avenue in line with the NSW Government's focus on improving cultural and creative industries</p> <p>v. Great Western Highway upgrades – Katoomba to Lithgow – continue to support upgrades and seek funding as this would significantly improve connectivity and accessibility across the landscape for new and emerging markets</p> <p>vi. Further leveraging rail tourism across the region – capitalising on experiences such as the heritage rail trial, ZigZag Railway and potential for a Bathurst Bullet pub tour</p>	<p>– To be determined</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Industry Advisory Group</li> <li>– Involve industry – incl. to identify opportunities for private sector investment or public-private partnerships (PPP)</li> <li>– NSW Government agencies as appropriate to each project</li> </ul> <p><i>The NSW Government's <b>cost benefit analysis framework</b> provides an important step towards effective business case development and feasibility assessment, essential to progress these projects. Refer: Destination Southern NSW DMP 2022 – 2030</i></p>

REF	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PROGRAM PARTNERS & LINKAGES
		<p>vii. Development of The Foundations Portland, providing housing solutions and an arts and culture precinct</p> <p>viii. Access to Wolgan Valley, the reopening of Emirates One&amp;Only Resort and the continued support of the WVA to achieve their community's aspirations for sustainable product and experience development</p> <p>ix. Working to establish continual support for the Capertee Valley</p> <p>x. Support other significant visitor-related projects on lands managed by NSW Government agencies, including NPWS, Forestry Corporation and Crown Lands</p>		

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1: ADOPTING A FUTURE-FOCUS FOR LITHGOW

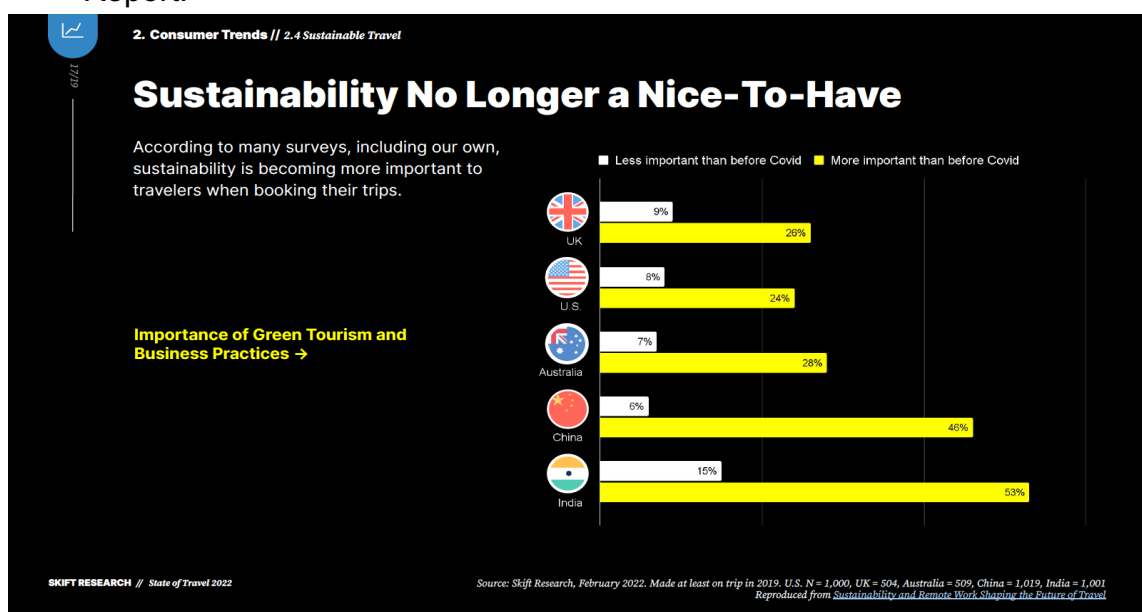
## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is no longer a trend, it is an expectation. Destinations that are consciously putting efforts towards preserving and regenerating our natural environment, and fostering community and culture will be the ones who succeed moving forward.

Sustainability is at the front and centre of the global psyche, shaping demand for low carbon footprint travel options and experiences that touch the earth and its communities lightly, leaving places and people better off than when they arrived. It is increasingly influencing traveller choices in terms of where to go, how to get there, where to stay, and which experiences they engage with at the destination (Tourism Australia - *Future of Global Tourism Demand 2022*).

The research:

- 2019 SKIFT Global Forum on The Greening of Travel: *'The travel and tourism industry need to accept that green business practices will be the next major competitive advantage for brands (and destinations) selling to leisure and business travellers alike.'*
- In 2021, Euromonitor International identified only five global trends that will influence how travel would rebound post COVID-19, one of which was that: *'Responsible and sustainable tourism would be the key in redesigning travel.'*
- SKIFT's 2022 Research Report - *Megatrends Defining Travel in 2022* – highlighted that *climate resilience is the new Return on Investment* in travel and tourism. A point that was further reinforced in their 2023 Megatrends Report.



- Tourism Australia’s 2022 Future of Global Tourism Demand report, states that more than 75% of travellers are committed to sustainability in some way.
- SKIFT’s ‘State of Travel 2023’ report highlights that 69% are actively seeking sustainable travel options and that 42% of respondents paid extra for a more sustainable travel option in the past 12 months.
  - It’s important to note that, pricing remains to be one of the biggest challenges to sustainable travel with 25% of respondents perceiving sustainable options to be too expensive.

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

At the heart of sustainable tourism is sustainable communities. In her presentation at the EarthCheck Inner Circle Forum 2023, Carolina Mendonca, DMO Coordinator for the Azores, commented that communities are at the centre of destinations and it’s important to find out what really matters to them. A thriving and vibrant community is what makes a destination truly special and worth visiting.

See the incredible work The Azores are doing in this space [here](#).

With the above in mind, a key market for any destination is their **Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR)** market. Building civic pride and local ambassadors for your destination will not only create vibrancy, but it will also activate residents to invite their friends and family to visit.

The SKIFT 2022 Megatrends Report stated; “Tourism boards embracing a “locals first” approach post-pandemic is here to stay, as is the imperative of having residents’ input on tourism management to ensure the industry’s future success. That’s because locals will become increasingly engaged in the future of their home, just as travellers will continue to seek sustainable, inclusive options.”

To thrive rather than just survive destinations will need to develop year-round strategies that actively encourage their resident’s participation in building a strong and sustainable visitor economy. From being part of a wholistic visitor services strategy to helping grow the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market and playing a more active role in the visitor experience i.e local ambassadors and storytellers.

### Key Considerations:

- Implement a hyper-local campaign to activate local residents to invite their friends and family to the destination.
  - DMS has developed a digital marketing solution for this exact purpose – it’s called [ComeVisit!](#)

## **REGENERATIVE TOURISM – a step beyond sustainability**

In business, sustainability generally refers to doing business without negatively impacting the environment, community, or society as a whole (Harvard Business School – What does “sustainability” mean in business). Whereas the World Economic Forum states that, “Businesses should take a long-term view and become a regenerative business, promoting the restoration and regeneration of natural resources and social systems.”

Globally, there is an increasing concern for the health of our environment. This has been heightened in Australia by recent and significant natural events, such as drought, fires and floods. It is resulting in an increased awareness of sustainability and the impact of climate change (both in general but also in terms of tourism and travel). Destinations that take a long-term view of leaving places, people and our planet better off than when they arrived will play a critical role in paving the way for the tourism industry.

### **Key Considerations:**

- Alignment with other key strategies and long-term visions for the future will be key to setting priorities and actions towards restoring and regenerating natural resources and social systems.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL GOVERNANCE (ESG)**

ESG reporting has been around for decades, however globally it is being transformed and is becoming much more rigorous. In June 2023, the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) released its new sustainability standards, IFRS S1 General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information and IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures.

ASIC Chair, Joe Longo, refers to these standards in a [speech](#) at the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) State of the Nation conference in June 2023, “Firms should be well advanced in embedding robust corporate governance practices ahead of more rigorous reporting requirements that are imminent in the standards being released by the ISSB”.

### **Key Considerations:**

- It is evident that as stakeholder expectations of transparency in sustainability and climate-related reporting rapidly increases in Australia and worldwide, both businesses and destinations should be preparing for higher standards of ESG reporting.

## FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Sustainable and regenerative tourism plays a key role in destination management and planning. It is also essential for the longevity of our planet.

Destinations should develop a roadmap towards sustainability that is integrated with their overall DMP or DAP and consider things such as:

- Thinking beyond ‘relaxing in nature’ is essential for tomorrow’s destinations – both as a disrupter to your competitors but also to strengthen your appeal as a destination. **Leveraging off existing products, services and assets** that embody sustainability will be critical to success.
- Nature tourism has been on an upward trend for many years now. Nature-based and eco-tourism offer a **clear direction for both accommodation and experience development**. More specifically, people are seeking:
  - Accommodation that more directly connects people with nature
  - Activities, outdoor recreation and opportunities to spend time together in nature
- Showcasing **the destination’s natural endowments** and looking at ways to **intertwine these nature-based experiences** with other sectors such as hospitality and accommodation will also be key.
- **Stakeholder engagement and industry development** that assists operators to improve their sustainability status and consider sustainable accreditation programs will be worthwhile.
- Considering the opportunity for **destination-wide sustainability accreditation**. Two organisations that offer credible certification programs at both the business and destination level are:
  - [Ecotourism Australia](#)
  - [EarthCheck](#)
- Developing **destination-wide sustainability programs** for travellers to reduce their CO2 output, such as the ‘[Trip Co2 Calculator](#)’ launched by Visit Sunshine Coast.

## TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Being mobile optimised and providing e-commerce functionality is no longer a value add. It's an essential. Essential because it addresses the **expectations** of today's travel markets.

The destinations that will succeed in the future are those that seamlessly integrate the human side of visitor servicing with the 'technology side'. Only then will destinations be able to meet current visitor expectations, deliver a positive visitor experience and attract new, high yield, markets.

## REIMAGINING VISITOR SERVICING & THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

The future implications for **visitor servicing** are significant. Best practice visitor servicing is now **omnichannel** and includes effective partnerships with local businesses. This will need to be supported by **high-quality online and digital systems** to enhance engagement and distribution of information; at **all touchpoints along the customer journey** – including e-commerce functionality.

While people will continue to play an important role in visitor servicing, the new model will need to consider how to take information out of the VIC, including through mobile VIC services, and deliver it directly to the visitor. Wherever they are.

This reinforces the importance of understanding the customer journey and the value of addressing all touchpoints along it.



A great opportunity, for example, and one that is mostly ignored, or at least undervalued, is the gap between people booking and people arriving in-destination. This is an ideal time to 'arm' your visitor with the information that could persuade them to see more, travel further and in the process, spend more.

At a time where resources are limited, considering efficient and effective ways for delivering visitor servicing will be critical. Providing information to visitors before they arrive in destination will assist in building awareness and preference to experience other offerings and drive increase length of stay and regional dispersal.

Efficient and effective omnichannel visitor services are connected and integrated across all channels. It differs from multi-channel, which often relies on multiple systems that potential become 'silos' and can lead to inconsistent or fragmented customer or visitor servicing.

## Key Considerations:

An omnichannel approach relies on several factors, including but not limited to:

- **Consistency in messaging** and communication, including in the tone of voice and manner that underpin the destination's brand
- **Encouraging all tourism and event operators, accommodation and experience providers to maintain an up-to-date listing on the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)** as well as consider listing their product or experience on an OTA platform. For experiences, activities and tours this could include the Big Red Group (which includes Red Balloon, ExperienceOz and Adrenalin). There are several options for accommodation providers. This is critical to extending reach through credible and well-known third-party channels and supports bookings through integrated e-commerce functionality.
- **Integration of channel management** (if possible, aim for a cost-effective omnichannel strategy) across voice, email and digital/online channels and with capacity for an effective interface with face-to-face information servicing and retail sales – this includes the ability to triage and re-direct queries to those with specialist or more detailed knowledge of a specific topic or area within the broader region. It should also consider opportunities for LiveChat or use of interactive video platforms for enriching visitor services (one-on-one to small group sessions).
- Access to and capacity for distribution and management of **remarkable and relevant content**, which leverages local information and is up-to-date and responsive to current circumstances, from weather to road closures or serious incidents such as wildfires or floods (localised or more wide-spread impacts). It is critical that distribution of content across channels is consistent.
- Well-managed procurement and fulfilment processes associated with **retail strategies** or other commercial services offered through the region's visitor servicing function, including for the local community.

A destination-wide omnichannel hub should also consider the following with regard to the way information and services are positioned and delivered:

- Provide **high-quality customer service across all channels**, which will enhance the visitor experience, appeal of the destination and word of mouth worthiness because the recipient has received timely, relevant and expert advice. It should be integrated to enable a holistic and consistent view of the customer or visitor across all systems or channels – this means avoiding 'silos' created by different, unintegrated systems that potentially serve or deliver different information to the same customer or visitor.
- In order to deliver on visitor expectations, destinations should consider integrating the advice or services of **local experts**, especially those who have local knowledge relating to special interest or niche markets. This could cover such areas as nature-based activities, health and well-being itineraries and sporting events through to art and culture and food and drink.

- Create an **opportunity to ‘upsell’** the destination by offering up experiences and reasons (e.g. products) for a visitor to consider extending their length of stay as well as an opportunity to increase their spend within the region.
  - Promoting **buy-local initiatives** provides another way for destinations to promote their brand, reinforce their values and distinguish their point of difference. This will be enhanced through **e-commerce**. For example, a retail strategy for a ‘destination store’ should focus on local products or experiences, including those offered by local artists, artisans or produce suppliers while also offering products that deliver a functional use, albeit destination-branded. These are unique mementos of a destination or gifts that may help to raise awareness of the destination or local businesses. From a purely business perspective, e-commerce enables ways for generating revenue, which can support the visitor servicing function.
- Provide a service to **personalise the information and the experiences**. This could be through developing itineraries, packages and bundling experiences to meet the needs of the individual visitor. The opportunity to achieve this will be further enhanced with advances in generative AI and it becomes both more widely available and cost effective. This specialised service will assist showcase the diversity of the region, encourage regional dispersal and increase length of stay.
  - Likewise, local experts would be able to assist in providing local tips and developing more-remarkable content for distribution (especially across digital and online channels), such as hints on what to pack, favourite spots or hidden gems.

## **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) & GENERATIVE AI (GenAI)**

As mentioned above, technology has influenced the way consumers experience travel and a new era of digitally enabled travel is upon us.

A recent report from SKIFT Research and McKinsey & Company called ‘The Promise of Travel in the Age of AI’ outlines that “digital technology, machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI), including generative AI (GenAI), are equipping the industry to reimagine what it means to plan, book, and experience travel. This surge of innovation sets the stage for companies to rethink how they interact with customers, develop and deliver products and services, and manage people and operations.”

Examples of how this is being applied by travel organisations include, AI-enabled trip planning, to individually tailored communication during disruptions, to live simulation models and virtual reality (VR) training to improve frontline decision making.

### **Key Considerations:**

- There is no doubt that AI and GenAI are being increasingly used across the tourism sector and stand to disrupt not just travel planning searches – and with that performance advertising – but it may also upend searches for travel inspiration as well. With that would come changes in how all sales and marketing throughout travel is done, as well as have the potential for huge gains in operational efficiency (SKIFT – *Generative AI's Impact on Travel*, April 2023).

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ENVIRONMENT BEFORE PRINTING  
THIS DOCUMENT.**