



ENVIRONMENT

SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMICS

Draft Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2015  
Planning Assessment

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Field of Expertise – Environment and Urban and Regional Planning

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This independent strategic planning assessment has been commissioned by Save Our Foreshore Inc.

The assessment is narrow in its focus and its brief is to specifically consider the planning provisions with respect to height within the Draft Airlie Beach Local Plan within the *Draft Whitsunday Regional Council Planning Scheme 2015* (the Draft Scheme).

Sections highlighted in green are taken directly from the Draft Scheme.

## 2. STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AND JUSTIFICATION

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The following documents have been considered in the preparation of this assessment and are the most relevant strategic planning documents which should have informed the development of any planning controls and planning for the future use and development of Airlie Beach;

- Airlie Beach Structure Plan; prepared by Place Design Group, for Whitsunday Regional Council, August 2014
- Airlie Beach local area plan key issues paper, prepared by Whitsunday Regional Council, May 2014
- Whitsunday region economic analysis: Economic and population study, prepared by Norling Consulting, November 2013
- The Whitsundays tourism opportunity plan 2012-2016, Tourism Queensland
- Whitsunday Shire Planning Scheme 2009
- Whitsunday 2020 corporate plan, Whitsunday Regional Council
- Community plan 2011-2021, Whitsunday Regional Council

Strategic Planning as would be appreciated is the critical component in preparation of any new planning scheme including a Local Area Plan for a defined area.

The principal purposes of local strategic planning, besides informing new planning schemes are to protect significant aspects of the local natural and built environment, guide the efficient and effective use and distribution of scarce resources at a local level

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and also guide the delivery of key infrastructure for the benefit of the local communities. Strategic Planning Studies require appropriate levels of research and data analysis and require reviewing of futures scenarios, options development, community and stakeholder engagement and often reconciling competing planning outcomes.

Most importantly Local Area Planning for it to be effective requires meaningful community consultation and engagement. Consultation facilitates greater acceptance and enhances the likelihood of future support for development applications and infrastructure delivery.

Whitsunday Shire Council has undertaken detailed Local Area Strategic Planning as evidenced by the extensive number of plans listed above.

None of these documents despite being the most relevant strategic guiding documents point to any need for an increase in the permissible building heights for Airlie Beach. The Airlie Beach Structure Plan contains a Concept plan for height but no strategic justification for an increase in height. Without there being some strategic basis for such an increase in height, the Airlie Beach Local Plan Heights Plan cannot be considered to constitute sound strategic planning.

### 3. EXISTING CHARACTER

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The existing character of Airlie Beach town centre, is low rise relatively compact, centred upon the Main Street with a developing and non-contiguous accommodation marina precinct at Port of Airlie. The building height within the main street of Airlie beach is predominantly one or two stories with an occasional 2 or 3 stories with a maximum building height of less than 10 metres.

### 4. PROPOSED HEIGHT PROVISIONS

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*Table 7.2.1.3.1 Criteria for self-assessable and assessable development, specifies performance outcomes and acceptable outcomes.*

Acceptable Outcome A01.1 specifies a maximum building height of 15 metres and references the Airlie Beach Local Area Plan Heights Plan which provides for building height of between 3 and 12 stories or 9 – 36/40 metres dependent upon the precinct or area.

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## 5. AIRLIE BEACH LOCAL PLAN CODE

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### 5.1. Section 7.2.1.2

The relevant section of the Airlie Beach Local Plan Code at section 7.2.1.2, in relation to height states:

*Editor's note – To the extent any inconsistency between the Airlie beach local plan code and any other part of the Planning scheme, the Airlie beach local plan code prevails.*

#### **7.2.1.2 Purpose and overall outcomes**

*(1) The purpose of the Airlie beach local plan code is to provide a development framework that facilitates growth to sustain and strengthen the economy, while retaining valuable community and natural assets.*

*(2) The purpose of the Airlie beach local plan code will be achieved through the following overall outcomes:*

*(c) the character of Airlie Beach, which includes its vital, small town scale, tropical climate, pedestrian neighbourhoods, compact Main Street form, blue views to the sea and green views to Airlie Hill, visually penetrable buildings and heights and lush landscape elements, is maintained;*

*(d) new development contributes to a consistent pallet of local streetscape elements and designs, resulting in the continuing development of the local streetscape character for the local plan area;*

*(e) development is designed and operated to minimise adverse impacts on the amenity of surrounding residential neighbourhoods, particularly that within the Airlie Hill precinct;*

#### **Comment**

The determined character of Airlie Beach as stated in 2 (c) is specific

*vital, small town scale, tropical climate, pedestrian neighbourhoods, compact Main Street form, blue views to the sea and green views to Airlie Hill, visually penetrable buildings and heights and lush landscape elements, is maintained;*

None of the above character statements could be retained if Airlie Beach was developed for 8 to 12 storey buildings. Gone would be the small town scale, compact Main Street (as the Port of Airlie would develop in competition to the Main Street), views to Airlie Hill and visually penetrable buildings.

Higher buildings within Airlie Beach would significantly impact the amenity of surrounding residential neighbourhoods by blocking and extinguishing in many circumstances vistas and blue views to the sea.

The proposed height provisions do not accord with the determined character of Airlie Beach or the purpose statements for the Airlie Beach Local Area Plan.

## 5.2. Precincts

The relevant sections in relation to height are listed below and comments follow.

### 5.2.1. Precinct 1: Main street and foreshore

*(3) The Main street and foreshore precinct supports and sustains development and suitable economic growth, ensuring that intensification is managed so to preserve the small town, tropical character of the Airlie Beach Main Street. This precinct provides the integrated centre of the Airlie beach local plan area, appropriately incorporating and optimising its natural assets and the lagoon parklands whilst supporting the diversification and growth of its tourist functions.*

*(4) The purpose of the Main street and foreshore precinct will be achieved through the following overall outcomes:*

*(e) taller building elements are set back from the street frontage to allow for light and air into the street and maintain the outdoor quality and human scale of the street. Highly attractive and permeable pedestrian based built form is created with a highly active ground floor and cross block links available during operational hours;*

#### Comment

Providing for 8 storey buildings is not considered to further the relevant purpose statement as per 4(a) above. 24 metre buildings would detract from and severely limit the existing human scale of the Main Street of Airlie Beach.

### 5.2.2. Precinct 2: Waterson Way

(5) The Waterson way precinct ensures that development and growth is supported in lands bound by Waterson Way and adjoining the Main street and foreshore precinct.

Intensified development in this precinct is to occur in line with the intent of each subprecinct and should provide diverse Accommodation, Business and Entertainment activities, which integrate with open space networks and natural assets.

(6) The purpose of the Waterson way precinct will be achieved through the following overall outcomes:

(b) development of Accommodation activities are of a low-medium rise format and occur predominantly above ground floor levels, enabling Business and Entertainment activities to complement and support the region's tourism market;

#### **Comment**

The above precinct purpose statement encourages **low-medium rise, 8 storey buildings** 24 metres in height are not medium low rise.

Waterson Way is a distinct precinct set back behind the Main Street and rather than dominating the Main street, (as would occur if 8 storey buildings were provided for), should be of a lesser intensity and scale.

### 5.2.3. Precinct 4: Port of Airlie

(9) The Port of Airlie precinct provides for a mix of activities that support marina and visitor functions whilst enhancing connections to the Main street and foreshore precinct. The Port of Airlie precinct promotes access to the Whitsunday Islands and the Great Barrier Reef for local private and commercial charter users, and integrates key cruise and bus terminal functions with other central uses in Airlie Beach.

(10) The purpose of the Port of Airlie precinct will be achieved through the following overall outcomes:

(d) development of Business activities is of a scale and intensity that is consistent with the intended role and function of the precinct supporting, not compromising the role and function of existing centres (primarily Airlie Beach Main Street). Development of these activities supports the day to day needs of residents and visitors, ensuring higher order shopping facilities, such as full-line supermarkets, department stores and discount department stores, are not established in the precinct;

#### **Comment**

The greatest height provided for under the Airlie Beach Local Plan (12 storeys) is within the Port of Airlie Precinct in the area which provides for the only opportunity for connection between the Airlie Beach Main Street and the Port.

12 storey buildings in this area would extinguish any connection between the Main Street and the Port and would cement the Port as being a separate enclave from the rest of the Airlie Beach township. There is the real potential for a lack of gradation in intensity between the township and the port. With the potential for such a massive increase in available floor area within the Port in the medium to longer term the Port as opposed to the existing town centre may become the focus for commercial activity, directly competing with the town centre.

12 storey buildings would contrast markedly with the established 4 to 5 storey building elements within the port.

## 6. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

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The following list surmises the potential impacts and possibly unexpected consequences of providing for the building height limits proposed under the draft Scheme.

- the significant increase in height would provide for a complete change to the urban form and character of the Airlie Beach Township, without apparently any consideration of what this might look like;
- overshadowing of public spaces, parks and the Airlie Beach Foreshore ;
- further alienation of the Airlie Beach Main Street from the Port of Airlie. 12 storey buildings within the Port of Airlie Mixed Use Zone would dominate and separate the existing tenuous connection between the Main Street of Airlie and the Port of Airlie;
- fragmentation of the Airlie Beach township. Providing for 12 storey buildings on the Port of Airlie greenfield site with the potential for such gross floor areas has would overshadow and dominate the lower level Airlie Beach Main Street.
- loss of views and vistas from, to and across the Airlie Beach township

## 7. STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

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### 7.1. Whitsunday Shire Planning Scheme 2009

Height of new development is max 9m/3 storeys to northern side of Shute Harbour Road; and up to 12m/4 storeys on southern side (set back from street and parks).

#### **Comment**

A maximum height of 12 stories is completely at odds with the previously determined height controls and without any strategic justification as to why it is necessary to increase the allowable height by such a large extent then the height chosen is likely to have unexpected consequences upon the existing built form and urban character of the area.

### 7.2. Airlie Beach Structure Plan

The structure plan although not adopted as Council Policy for all intent and purposes has been adopted in the Draft Scheme as the Draft Scheme incorporates precisely the Building Heights Concept Plan. Although a Concept Plan, it has been adopted and there is no justification or consideration in the Structure Plan as to why it is necessary to increase the allowable building height and importantly what the likely consequences of increasing the allowable height would be, both positive and negative.

## 8. CONCLUSION

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Without any strategic analysis of the potential impacts that an increase in allowable height might have upon economic growth, urban form and character, community cohesion and surrounding precincts, the increases in height proposed are not justified and should not be adopted.