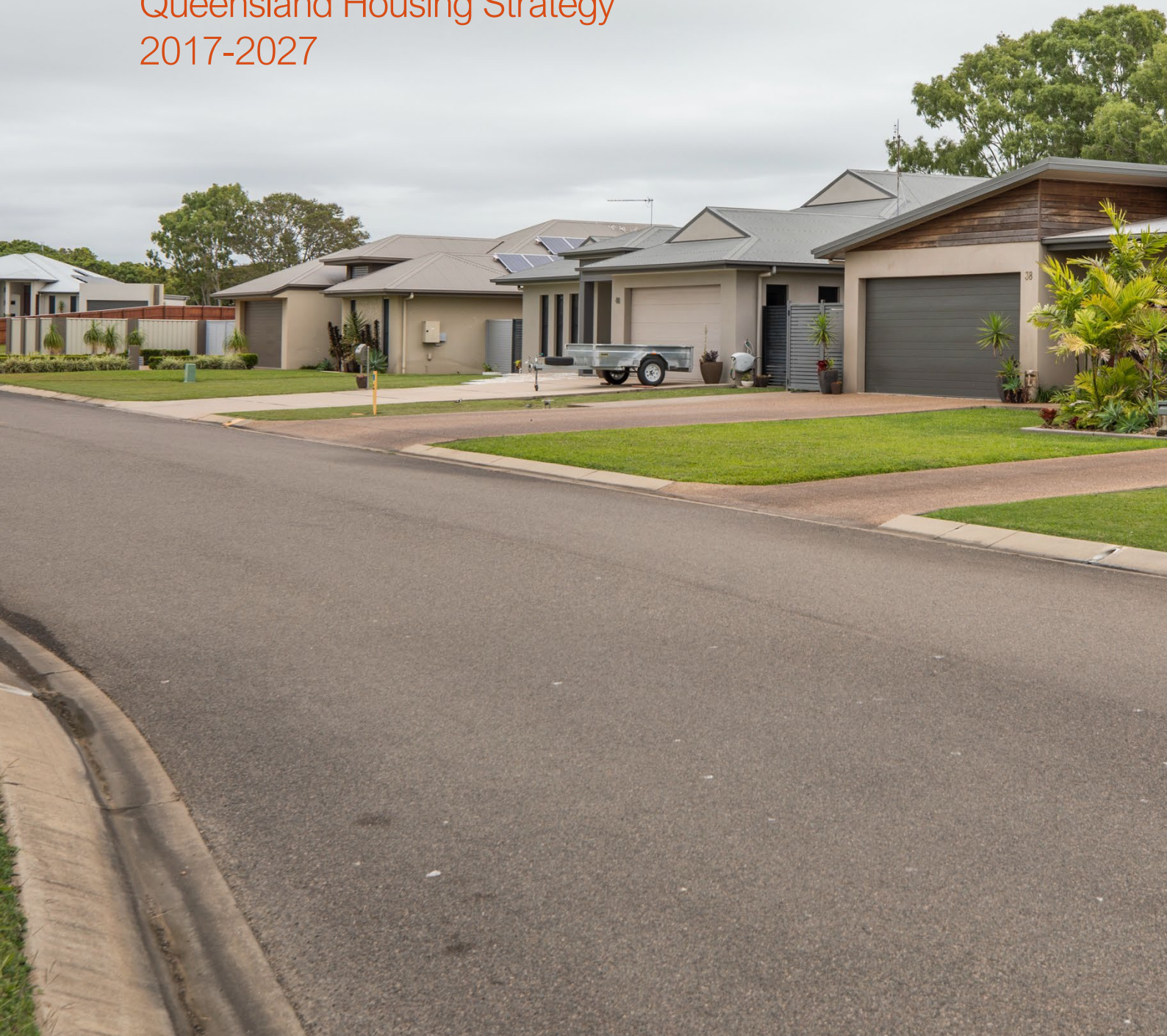


# Burdekin Shire Council

## Local Housing Action Plan

Queensland Housing Strategy

2017-2027



Queensland  
Government

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## Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the Bindal and Juru people of the Birri Gubba Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burdekin Shire Council (2023), *Annual Report for 2022/23*.

## Introduction

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government, Burdekin Shire Council, Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and community housing stakeholders to respond to a range of immediate, emerging, and longer-term housing challenges in the Burdekin region.

This is an iterative process that does not intend to duplicate existing actions of Council or the actions under the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 or the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025. It seeks to identify opportunities, consider an agreed response, develop targeted actions on key priorities and enable ongoing review of effort to adapt and respond to changing need.

The Plan aims to:

1. develop agreed priority actions to respond to housing need in the local government area.
2. establish strong foundations for longer-term housing responses to assist housing and homelessness outcomes in the local government area into the future.
3. incorporate existing information and plans that assist with developing responses to housing need and acknowledge work already completed by the Council, state agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations.
4. facilitate targeted interaction between all parties through agreed actions to ensure a focus on deliverables and projects that can improve housing responses in the short and longer-term.



## Approach and methodology

The plan provides an overview of key community and housing characteristics, and emerging issues related to housing in the community and identifies a targeted initial set of priority actions to respond to housing need. It has been developed through a review of a range of supporting documentation including:

- Council's *Corporate Plan 2022- 2027*
- Council's *Burdekin Shire Council Planning Scheme 2022*
- Council's *Annual Report for 2022/23*
- Other relevant Council strategies, reports and plans
- Statistical data from the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, including Census and other data sets such as building approvals, rental market data and housing approvals
- Housing needs data from the Department of Housing and other state and federal agencies
- The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 and the Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025
- Homes for Queenslanders, February 2024
- Other local data and information.

Emerging issues and opportunities, key challenges and potential responses have been developed from the review of a range of data sets, anecdotal feedback, and preceding engagement opportunities with Council and other stakeholders.

## Key facts

The Burdekin Shire has a total land area of 5,044 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 16,890.<sup>2</sup>

Burdekin Shire is located in the Dry Tropics region of North Queensland, about 80 kilometres south-east of Townsville and about 1,300 kilometres north-west of Brisbane. Over 65% of the population reside in the main towns of Ayr and Home Hill. Surrounding townships include Alva, Brandon, Clare, Dalbeg, Giru, Groper Creek, Inkerman, Jerona, Millaroo and Wunjunga.<sup>3</sup>

The Burdekin is where unspoilt natural beauty meets a thriving rural community right on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef. Famous for its abundant sunshine and rich agriculture, the Shire's most important asset is water. The Burdekin River, combined with a massive underground aquifer and the Burdekin Falls Dam, make the district drought resistant. Whilst the Burdekin is one of Australia's richest agricultural regions, the area also boasts strong horticultural, aquaculture and manufacturing industries and is recognised as having high levels of solar irradiation, with two solar farms located in the district. Council continues to expand its support and focus in developing tourism opportunities to attract extra visitor stays and expenditure and sees tourism as a key driver for job creation as part of the economic diversification of the Shire.<sup>4</sup>

Burdekin Shire Council's Gross Regional Product is estimated at \$1.30 billion, which represents 0.33% of Queensland's Gross State Product.<sup>5</sup> The Shire's economy is driven by agriculture, forestry and fishing, accounting for 33% of all FTE employment in the area. Other key employment sectors are manufacturing (14%); health care and social assistance (8.6%); education and training (6.7%); and retail trade (6.1%).<sup>6</sup>

Burdekin Shire Council is one of five members of the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (NQROC), the other four being Charters Towers Regional Council, Hinchinbrook Shire Council, Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and Townsville City Council.<sup>7</sup>

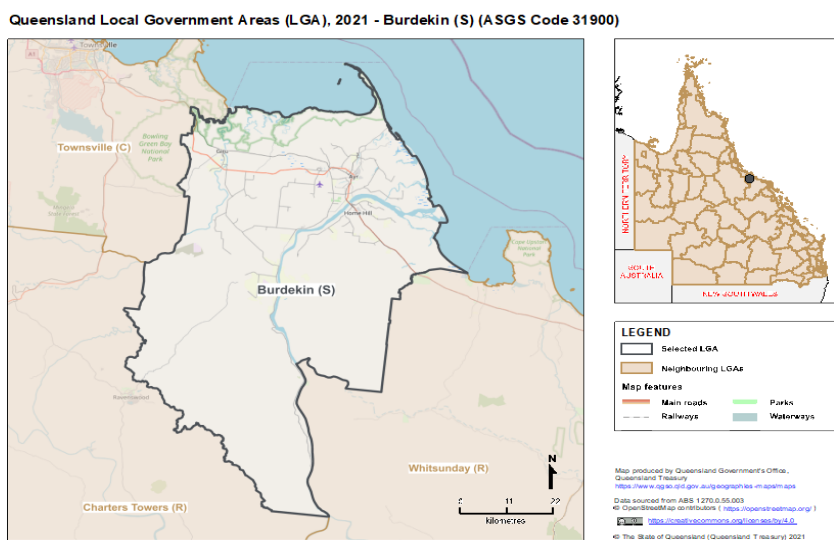


Figure 1: Burdekin Region ASGS 2021

<sup>2</sup> As of 30 June, 2022. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), *Regional population, 2021-22*.

<sup>3</sup> Burdekin Shire Council (2023), *Burdekin Shire Council Planning Scheme 2022*.

<sup>4</sup> Burdekin Shire Council (2023), *Burdekin Regional Profile* (accessed 2 Nov 2023).

<sup>5</sup> .id community (2023), *Burdekin Shire Council economic profile* (accessed 2 Nov 2023).

<sup>6</sup> .id community (2023), *Burdekin Shire Council economic profile: Employment by industry (FTE)* (accessed 2 Nov 2023).

<sup>7</sup> North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (2023), *Our Region* (accessed 26 Nov 2023).

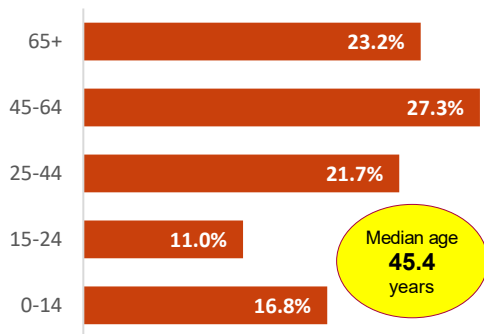
# Local government area characteristics<sup>8</sup>

## Demographic characteristics

Estimated resident population is **16,890** (ABS, 2022). Recent analysis projects population to increase to **18,683** by 2041 (i.e. by 9.1%).<sup>9</sup>

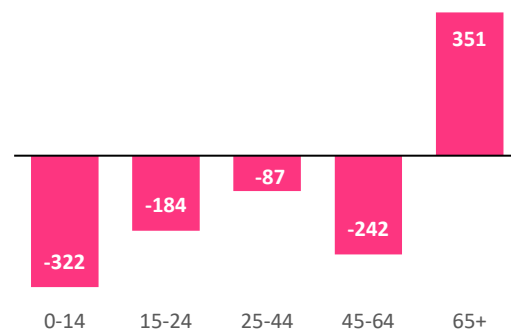
### Age breakdown

June 2022 (ABS)



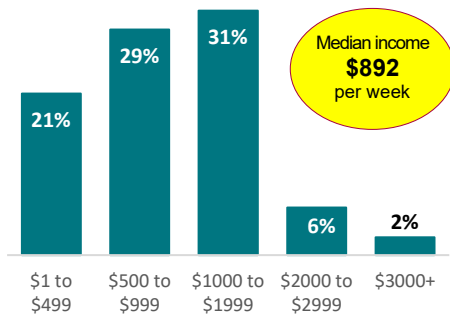
### Population change 2017-2021

Census 2021



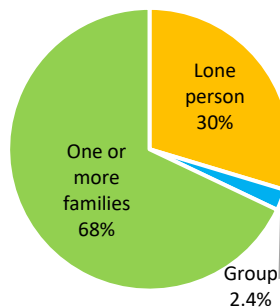
### Household weekly income

Census 2021



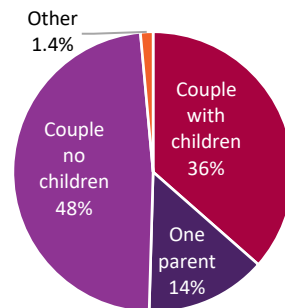
### Household composition

Census 2021



### Family composition

Census 2021



<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the charts and statistics in this section are derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), *Data by region – LGA 31900 dataset*.

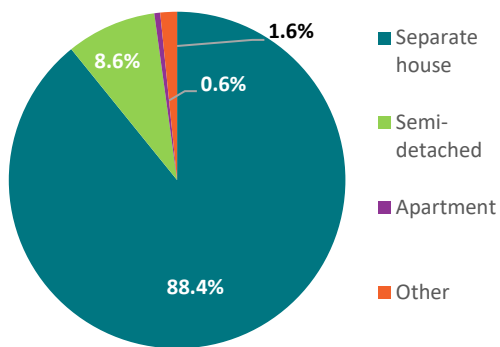
<sup>9</sup> .id (Informed Decisions) (unpublished, 2023), *Forecast Data*. Compiled and presented by .id, informed decisions. [www.id.com.au](http://www.id.com.au).

## Housing characteristics

Total residential dwellings (2021) **8,229**, with **13.1%** unoccupied.

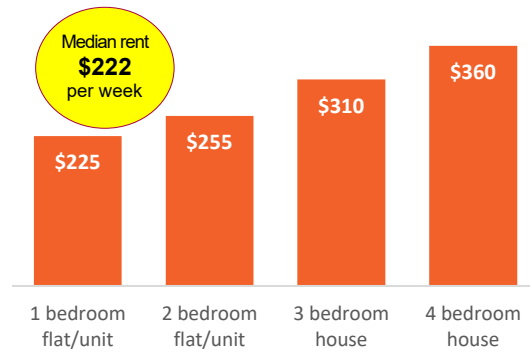
### Dwellings by structure

Census 2021



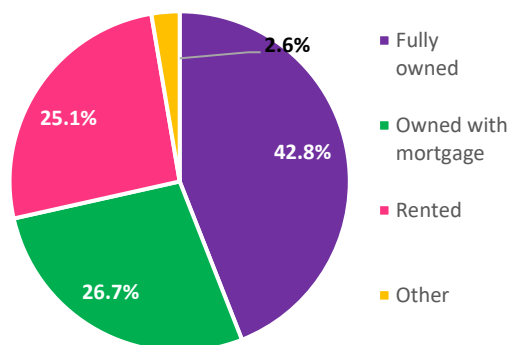
### Median weekly rent

Census 2021



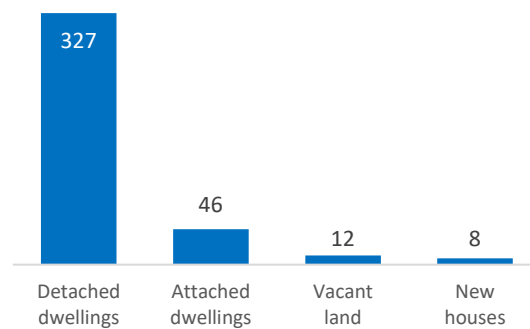
### Dwellings by tenure

Census 2021



### Residential sales (no.)

12 months to June 2023 (QGSO)



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## Key focus areas

Areas of focus have been determined through a review of existing data and engagement with stakeholders as identified in the methodology. These focus areas will be considered when identifying and prioritising actions.

## Background

In relation to housing, Burdekin Council's strategic intent of "a thriving lifestyle" is described as follows:

The range of housing, services and employment available make it attractive for young people to stay, as well as ensuring people can continue to live in their communities as they age.

The shire's major towns have attractive, cohesive and vibrant commercial centres, providing many formal and informal opportunities for community interaction and contributing to a strong local identity.

All the shire's towns and villages provide affordable housing options for their diverse communities, visitors and farm workers. This includes traditional family houses, dual occupancies, townhouses and apartments, as well as retirement and aged care accommodation. Land is used efficiently to ensure cost effective provision of urban infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

Local real estate agents report that while the Census data describes many dwellings as unoccupied, their experience is that few of these are rental properties, and the rental vacancy rate is virtually zero.

Regarding housing affordability in the Shire, real estate agents report that most three-bedroom rental properties are being let at higher than the 2021 Census median of \$310 per week. Nonetheless, at this price, rental properties in the Burdekin remain affordable: the issue is that these properties simply aren't available due to extremely low vacancy rates and an inadequate rate of new supply. One agency gave the example of a business manager intending to move to the Shire to take up a new position but who couldn't start work because there was no rental property available for them.

## Areas of focus

- Supply of new housing
- Barriers to new developments
- Increasing the housing options diversity
- Workforce housing
- Other cohort-specific housing
  - Social housing
  - Aged care accommodation
  - Retirement villages
  - Specialist Disability Housing (SDA)
  - First Nations

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<sup>10</sup> Burdekin Shire Council (2023), *Burdekin Shire Council Planning Scheme 2022*.

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## Supply of new housing

In terms of property sales, the demand from potential buyers greatly exceeds the supply of properties (new or existing) coming onto the market. One real estate agent said they had over fifty clients on their books with pre-approved finance. They estimated that two-thirds of their sales of residential rental properties are going to owner-occupiers; another real estate agent reported that at their agency it was an even higher proportion. The consensus from the November 2023 workshop, was that onerous new regulations, increased costs (including interest rates) and low rental returns are major disincentives for landlords.

While the nature of the residential tenure doesn't affect the Shire's population, the increase in the number of owner-occupiers has a significant impact on an already tight rental market, as former rental properties are removed from the rental pool.

This growing unavailability of housing has flow-on effects for the most disadvantaged. Burdekin Community Association (BCA), the primary support service in the Shire, reports that they are having to turn away families seeking housing as there is no accommodation the association can support them in accessing.

## Barriers to new developments

Stakeholders report that the supply of land is strong, but there are significant barriers to its development.

One key issue is the risk of flooding. The requirement for floor levels to be 300mm above the Q100 flood line imposes substantially higher costs for development of land (or redevelopment of an existing property) within that flood zone. The flood risk also contributes to higher insurance costs.

It was noted that Burdekin's second-largest urban area, Home Hill, has many empty shops which might be suitable for redevelopment into residential housing. However, as much of Home Hill is within the flood zone, the cost to redevelop and the low return on investment combine to discourage any new use of these vacant properties.

Stakeholders identified that a barrier to developing unserviced land is the major additional infrastructure costs involved, including sewerage, potable water and the roadworks required for access to State-controlled roads. These extra costs don't apply to existing residential properties and therefore create a disincentive to developing land in locations Council's master planning has identified as ideal for new housing.

Local stakeholders also identified that a shortage of builders and other construction trades is creating a bottleneck for new housing. This runs the risk of being a self-perpetuating cycle, as the lack of housing limits the Shire's capacity to attract the additional construction workforce it needs.

Another potential barrier to new development is the confidence to invest locally. It was noted that adverse outlooks such as current ABS population projections can impact negatively on the decision to invest locally or to move to (or stay in) the Shire to live, whereas a vibrant economy and growing population can act as incentives for further growth and development.

## Increasing the housing options diversity

Increasing the housing density, especially through the development of units, townhouses and apartments in key urban areas such as Ayr and Home Hill, offers new opportunities for particular demographic cohorts. This kind of housing diversity is ideal for young professionals without children who are looking to move to the Shire, and also for older "empty nester" couples seeking more appropriate housing as they age. The added bonus that increased housing diversity offers with the latter cohort is that their move to a new one- or two-bedroom property potentially frees up a three- or four-bedroom property with a large back yard, ideal for a family to move in to.



Opportunities to increase the housing density include retrofitting existing buildings (for example, disused commercial buildings, former hotel or other residential buildings, rooms above existing retail premises), and redevelopment of well-located low-density land such as old, under-utilised houses on large blocks.

Council notes that the new planning scheme enables increased residential densification of existing land (e.g. “brownfield” developments) on merit.

## Workforce housing

### Permanent non-government employees

In order to employ appropriately skilled and suitable employees, employers are required to prioritise attraction and retention incentives such as housing when housing stock is limited, or housing standards do not match employee expectations.

Relocating an employee’s family away from more populated areas creates stress, so availability of good quality housing is an important element in the transition and in an employee’s ongoing performance.

Burdekin Shire stakeholders report that there is a significant shortage of suitable housing for staff in the community services, business and retail sectors.

### Seasonal workforce

Stakeholders reported that there has been a long-term change from previously strong local workforce participation, mostly living in their existing accommodation, to an increasingly non-local or itinerant workforce. A key source of the latter group is the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (“PALM”) scheme, which supports Pacific Islanders to come to Australia to meet local workforce needs. Visas are provided for the short-term (up to nine months), or for long-term stays of 1–4 years. Stakeholder feedback suggests that opportunities within the PALM scheme to allow and potentially assist participants to buy a home in the local area would benefit not only the participant but also the farmer (with greater certainty that any expenditure on skills training – e.g. in obtaining a forklift licence – would be a long-term investment in the employee) and the Shire more broadly.

It was reported that some farmers had set up “quarantine camps” during the COVID crisis, but since then many seasonal workers have been housed on-farm (for example, in permanent outhouse quarters or in caravans), in existing hotels, or in hotels acquired by farmers specifically for their workforce housing.

Some farmers are also renting properties on the private market and providing it to their workers, and it’s reported that labour hire firms are increasingly taking up residential leases as well. In both cases, this results in a further contraction of the housing options for long-term renters.

### Government employees

Burdekin Council is not in a position to provide housing for its own employees: they are required to make their own accommodation arrangements.

The State Government supplies housing for its employees under three systems. One of these, the Government Employee Housing (GEH) program, manages a portfolio of government-owned properties in localities where the private rental market is unable to meet the identified need for a State Government agency’s employee. The three main agencies served by GEH are the QPS (Police) and the Departments of Health and Education.

The GEH program has a five-year capital funding allocation to build new houses to meet the forward demand identified by their client agencies. The GEH is able to source State-owned land, repurpose existing government properties or acquire new land, and prioritises where to build any new housing in consultation with the relevant LGA.

The GEH advises that there are 26 GEH properties in Burdekin Shire, most of them located in the two urban centres of Ayr and Home Hill. There is currently no forward demand from any government agency for GEH to supply new housing in the Shire.

## Other cohort-specific housing

### Social housing need

In Burdekin Shire there were just 171 social housing dwellings as of 30 June 2022: 132 public housing, 13 community housing (including Aboriginal Community Housing organisations) and 26 government-managed indigenous housing (“SOMIH”).<sup>11</sup>

As of 30 June 2023, there were 82 applicants on the Social Housing Register with a location in Burdekin Shire as one of their preferences. Every one of these applicants was categorised as having a “Very High” level of housing need. On average, those applicants have been on the waiting list for 729 days (almost exactly two years), with 11 households (13%) having been waiting on the Register for more than four years.<sup>12</sup>

The total number of allocations to social housing properties in Burdekin Shire in the 12 months to June 2022 was just twelve: eight to public housing general stock (RGS), two to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Housing (i.e. SOMIH), and two to long-term community housing.<sup>13</sup> This total represents just 15% of households currently registered for social housing in the Shire and classified as being in Very High need.

BCA is the only funded Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) in the Shire. In the 2022-23 financial year, BCA assisted 876 service users who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.<sup>14</sup> BCA notes that the Department of Housing’s Housing Service Centres used to be regionally based but have been centralised so that the nearest Centre is now over 50km away, in Townsville. This has made it harder to advocate for the specific housing support needs of the local area. Feedback is that the two largest cohorts seeking housing support are single older males, and unemployed youth (up to 30 years). Greater housing provision for these two cohorts is urgently needed.

BCA reports that the rental housing crisis is such that support workers have been forced to issue tents to clients seeking emergency housing. The service’s five crisis accommodation dwellings have few vacancies, which is a result of the lack of available private rental housing and the current wait times for social housing even for those in highest need.

### Aged care accommodation and retirement villages

There are no registered retirement villages in the Shire. A proposal to develop one was prepared in 2006 but did not proceed; however, the land is still available. A second option was proposed but failed for lack of an interested party to take up the ongoing management of the village.

There are a number of aged care providers in the Burdekin. However, stakeholders have identified an unmet demand for respite care, and also insufficient options for older persons wishing to stay at home but needing some degree of care.

Local discussion has included barriers to expanding the provision of aged care in Home Hill, due to building requirements in a flood zone. This was seen as an opportunity for Council to open up conversations with not-for-profit organisations on the potential to develop new independent living units (ILUs) in the location.

### Specialist Disability Housing

Specialist Disability Housing providers were not available to provide input into the initial draft of this plan. Further engagement with this sector will occur in the next 6 months.

### First Nations

Bur-Del Housing manages 77 properties, including 72 owned by the organisation (38 houses, 4 two-bedroom units and 30 one-bedroom units) plus 5 two-bedroom units managed as a head lease. Feedback suggests that urgent housing need for First Nations households is currently being met.

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Government Open Data Portal (2023), [Public housing and State owned and managed Indigenous housing—dwelling data](#) and [Community housing—dwelling data](#)

<sup>12</sup> Queensland Government Open Data Portal (2023), [Social Housing Register at 30 June 2023 - Data File](#)

<sup>13</sup> Queensland Government Open Data Portal(2023), [2021-22 Allocations to Public Housing - data file](#) and [2021-22 Allocations to Community Housing - data file](#)

<sup>14</sup> Burdekin Community Association (2023), [BCA Annual Report 2022-2023](#).

## Consultation

In preparing the Burdekin Shire Local Housing Action Plan, Council engaged with a range of stakeholders including:

- Targeted stakeholder workshop held on 22 November 2023. Following this initial workshop, stakeholders were provided with a draft of the priority actions for feedback. Stakeholders included local community housing providers, social welfare providers, real estate agents, farmers and Chambers of Commerce.
- Burdekin Shire Council Economic Advisory Group – presented draft actions for feedback at meeting held on 1 February 2024.

## Response opportunities

A Local Housing Action Plan enables engagement across all levels of government, and benefits from partnerships between private and not-for-profit organisations.

An initial set of tactical actions has been developed, enabling refinement through an ongoing iterative process. These actions provide for a targeted response and outcomes that will seek to either create immediate benefit or establish a foundation for the next phase of actions. More specific responses can then be determined that provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.



## Actions

The Council with the support of the Queensland Government through the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 is committed to engage in the delivery of its initial Local Housing Action Plan through this set of actions, developed to target immediate to longer term housing responses. This is an iterative process, and these actions and target outcomes will seek to either create immediate benefit or to establish foundations that help respond to ongoing housing need.

1	<b>Land and Development</b> Review land holding for contribution towards disaster response and future housing	Key Focus Area	Timeline
1.1	Work with the State to review results of the audit of Government land and property to identify potential opportunities to increase housing supply.	1. Supply	
1.2	Advocate for the State Government to provide incentives for developers through infrastructure charging reductions on priority developments, particularly those that diversify the housing stock – perhaps through the \$350m 'Homes for Queenslanders' funding.	2. Barriers	
1.3	Advocate for the State Government to provide multiyear funding for a Regional Housing Officer to implement initiatives identified in the plan.	5. Other	
1.4	Reengage with Defence Housing Australia regarding the opportunity for defence personnel posted to Townsville to reside in nearby townships.	1. Supply	

2	<b>Planning</b> Review Planning Scheme to identify options to expand development	Key Focus Area	Timeline
2.1	Review the planning scheme and development incentives for opportunities to improve housing diversity within the region.	2. Barriers	
2.2	Advocate for assistance to access improved demographic data including population forecasts, school enrolments, childcare waiting lists etc, in particular for regional LGAs projected by the ABS to have poor or negative population growth to 2046, so that new trends over the last 3-5 years are properly factored in.	5. Other	
2.3	Advocate that the State promote rural and remote Queensland as a desirable destination for professionals, young families, businesses, investors and retirees.	5. Other	
2.4	Identify and address barriers for farmers wanting to create on-farm accommodation for workers.	2. Barriers	

3	<b>Optimisation</b> Identify underutilised land or property to optimise development opportunities	Key Focus Area	Timeline
3.1	Ensure planning for major projects in the shire considers creating additional housing stock to accommodate the influx of workers accompanying any new project or partnership.	1. Supply	
3.2	Engage with the community housing sector to explore opportunities to increase housing stock.	1. Supply	
3.3	Identify and promote government incentives (eg tax or stamp duty concessions) to encourage single or two-person households to downsize, and advocate that Government amend initiatives to provide targeted opportunities for empty nesters with low-value properties to downsize.	3. Diversity	
3.4	Improve the quality and affordability of rental housing in the State's cyclone zone by advocating that the State relax eligibility for the Housing Resilience Program to include non-owner-occupiers' properties located in areas of identified housing shortage.	6. Other	

4	<b>Master planning</b> Consider any master planning on identified land by site / street / suburb	Key Focus Area	Timeline
4.1	Seek funding (e.g. grants or subsidies to Local Government) to provide trunk infrastructure in areas identified for future residential development, including, but not limited to, applying for the \$500 million Federal Government 'Housing Support Program'.	2. Barriers	

5	<b>Supports</b> Provide appropriate service support and resilience responses	Key Focus Area	Timeline
5.1	Advocate for the State to utilise the Construction Workforce Fund to promote taking up a trade in the Burdekin LGA, and support those who are interested with accommodation subsidies and transitional or temporary housing to ensure these opportunities can be taken up.	2. Barriers	
5.2	Work with other local governments (through NQROC and LGAQ), local MPs and other stakeholders, to seek project funding to support regional LGAs to increase the supply of workforce housing for the community service, business and retail sectors.	4. Workforce	
5.3	Advocate that the State Government ensures there is sufficient housing of an acceptable standard in rural and remote LGA's for State Government agency and service staff to minimise the impact on the general housing markets.	4. Workforce	
5.4	Advocate to addresses inequities in accessing finance and insurance and meeting flooding requirements when seeking to purchase a residential property in rural and remote regions.	2. Barriers	
5.5	Advocate to the State and Federal Governments to ensure new legislation regarding rental properties does not discourage investment in rental markets by landlords.	2. Barriers	

6	<b>People in need</b> Develop specific cohort responses	Key Focus Area	Timeline
6.1	Advocate for State support to undertake a needs assessment and develop policy options for (a) crisis accommodation and (b) youth and family violence housing, including identification and/or recommendation of opportunities to deliver or expand on accommodation of this kind in the region.	5. Other	
6.2	Promote to developers and key stakeholders the opportunities for developing a range of older persons' accommodation facilities in the region, including ILUs for sale to the private market, over-55s resort-style housing, retirement villages, and aged care facilities.	5. Other	
6.3	Engage with not-for-profit providers on opportunities to develop new seniors housing in Home Hill and how to address barriers such as flood zones and capital funding.	5. Other	

7	<b>Construction</b> Consider opportunities to enable new construction	Key Focus Area	Timeline
7.1	Work with the State to advocate for the establishment of a low or no-interest 'Housing Innovation Fund', to support innovative development which would otherwise be unable to attract conventional financing – such as build-to-rent or housing support ageing-in-place in the Burdekin LGA.	3. Diversity	
7.2	Work with the State Government to ensure promotion of the Queensland Housing Finance Loan.	1. Supply	
7.3	Explore avenues to support local manufacturing and innovative construction (faster, cheaper, and/or higher quality) through partnerships with local industry and research institutions investigating prefabrication, modular or industrialised house-building programs to address regional housing costs.	1. Supply	

8	<b>Capital solutions</b> Identify and develop capital solutions for sites	<b>Key Focus Area</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
8.1	Continue to encourage housing development proposals and partnerships that further Council's strategic intent of "a vibrant and connected community and a location of choice in which to live, work, play, visit and invest."	1. Supply	

## Next steps

Council will convene a Local Housing Action Plan meeting comprising representatives from Council, relevant State agencies, community housing providers and other key stakeholder groups, to oversee and progress actions, review findings, report 6-monthly on progress and further develop this LHAP as a living document and a long-term plan to address the local housing challenges.