

15.1 PUBLIC EXHIBITION OF THE DRAFT WOLLONDILLY NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY STRATEGY

Directorate: Shire Futures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's support to publicly exhibit the draft Night-time Economy Strategy (draft Strategy) for public exhibition.

The draft Strategy sets a clear vision to foster a more vibrant, diverse, well-connected and collaborative night-time economy across the Shire, and includes a realistic action plan to deliver on this vision.

Extensive community, local business and stakeholder input has shaped the development of the draft Strategy, through surveys, workshops, conversations and other engagement activities. The draft Strategy also draws on economic analysis, an after dark walking audit of Picton, and best practice examples from across Australia, together with guidance from the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner.

To support the community's vision for a more vibrant, diverse and accessible Wollondilly after dark, the draft Strategy identifies five pillars. These are:

- Experience – foster a vibrant, diverse, fun and engaging night-time economy
- Movement – enhance night-time safety, accessibility, and connectivity
- Destination – position Wollondilly as a distinctive after-dark destination
- Connection – build strong partnerships across the public, private, and community sectors
- Framework – an enabling regulatory framework to support our night-time economy.

The draft Strategy identifies 22 actions. Two thirds of the actions are designed to provide benefits Shire-wide, to strengthen Wollondilly's night-time economy and enhance opportunities for residents, visitors, and local businesses.

It is recommended that Council endorse the draft Strategy for public exhibition. Community engagement is proposed to be undertaken for a 6-week period as soon as practicable. This exceeds the minimum 28-day requirement set out in the Wollondilly Community Participation Plan.

During the exhibition period, Council will directly consult with local Business Chambers, relevant Strategic Reference Groups and our community.

Endorsing the draft Strategy for exhibition will enable broad community and business input and ensure the final Strategy reflects a shared vision and clear action plan for growing Wollondilly's night-time economy.

Following the exhibition, the feedback received will be reviewed and the Strategy updated as required, before being reported back to Council for adoption.

This report also recommends that Council adopt an interim parking position to align with the vision for growing the Shire's night-time economy, until such time that the comprehensive Wollondilly Development Control Plan is adopted.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Endorse public exhibition of the Draft Night-time Economy Strategy, for a minimum of 6 weeks.
2. Subject to no submissions contrary to the Strategy being received during the public exhibition period, adopt the Night-time Economy Strategy as exhibited.
3. Adopt the interim parking position as outlined within this report, until such time that the comprehensive Wollondilly Development Control Plan is adopted.

REPORT

Background

A strong night-time economy has the potential to deliver significant cultural, social, and economic benefits for Wollondilly. It also complements major projects such as the Wollondilly Community, Cultural and Civic Precinct, with the Performing Arts Centre already acting as a catalyst for evening activity, driving greater visitation and supporting nearby businesses.

Additionally, the night-time economy has received significant focus and investment at the State level through the establishment of the NSW Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, providing guidance and investment to create safe, vibrant night-time opportunities across NSW. Council has benefitted from this direction through workshops and forums that informed the preparation of Wollondilly's approach to growing the night-time economy.

On 25 February 2025, Council considered a report and resolved Resolution (13/2025) to include the preparation of a Night-time Economy Strategy for Wollondilly in the Draft 2025/26 Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

As a precursor to the draft Strategy, Council prepared the Wollondilly Night-time Economy Framework Discussion Paper, completed in early 2025. This Discussion Paper was informed by preliminary consultation with the community and local businesses during 2024, alongside desktop research, and identified barriers, opportunities, potential focus areas and interventions to guide the development of Wollondilly's night-time economy.

The draft Strategy builds on this work and has been shaped by further community, business and stakeholder consultation, a night-time walking audit of Picton, cross-department collaboration within Council, and best practice examples from across Australia. It has generally adopted the structure of the Night-time Economy Strategy template, a resource prepared by the NSW Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner.

The draft Strategy sets a Shire-wide vision for a more vibrant, diverse, accessible and collaborative night-time economy. Given Wollondilly's dispersed population and low density, success depends on concentrating efforts and investment on a select number of strategic precincts, rather than attempting to uniformly activate all towns and villages from the outset.

Picton is identified as the natural starting point. It is the Shire's established commercial and civic hub, with an emerging base of evening trading activity and key cultural

infrastructure, such as the Performing Arts Centre. Preliminary community and business feedback also indicated a strong preference to focus on a small number of towns and precincts, with Picton being the preferred option for night-time economy activation.

Building on Picton's existing strengths will create the strongest foundation for early success and foster activity that complements, rather than competes with, the future Wilton Town Centre.

Over time, additional precincts are expected to play a larger role, particularly those that have existing or proposed cultural or tourism assets and businesses already operating in the night-time economy. This includes the future Wilton Town Centre, Tahmoor, Appin, Thirlmere, Warragamba and The Oaks Aviation Precinct as identified in the draft Strategy.

To deliver this vision, the draft Strategy identifies five focus areas or pillars: Experience, Movement, Destination, Connection and Framework. These are supported by clear realistic actions and priorities across short, medium and long-term horizons. The draft Strategy and over two thirds of the actions have been developed to create opportunities for developing a night-time economy Shire-wide. Implementation of these actions will identify in greater detail the opportunities across specific towns and villages.

The actions outlined in this draft Strategy will be implemented in partnership with local businesses, community groups, and government stakeholders to grow Wollondilly's night-time economy in a coordinated and sustainable way. Each action has been allocated a proposed timeframe for delivery, along with the identification of relevant stakeholders who can support its implementation.

Funding for key actions and projects will be drawn from a combination of Council revenue streams, with additional opportunities sought through State and Federal Government grants. Some actions are contingent on the successful receipt of external funding, and this Strategy aims to position Council favourably for such opportunities by providing a clear plan, defined timeframes, and demonstrated commitment to delivery. Where appropriate, actions may be elevated into Council's Delivery Program or Operational Plan to prioritise implementation and strengthen grant applications.

The draft Strategy is provided at **Attachment 1**.

Strategic Context

Alignment with State and local strategies and policies is paramount to developing a successful night-time economy in Wollondilly. The NSW Government has recently introduced many reforms that emphasise the importance of the night-time economy, as well as providing major infrastructure investments into projects such as the Wollondilly Community, Cultural and Civic Precinct.

These initiatives and investments are timely for the development of a Night-time Economy Strategy for Wollondilly, to help achieve maximum benefits and flow-on effects to the local economy. The draft Strategy reflects this shift in State priorities and aligns with key actions and planning priorities identified in local strategies and plans, including:

- Wollondilly 2033 Community Strategic Plan
- Wollondilly 2040: Local Strategic Planning Statement
- Wollondilly Destination Management Plan
- Picton Place Plan

- Wollondilly Community, Cultural and Civic Precinct.

Related Council Resolutions

Resolution 13/2025 from the Ordinary Council Meeting held on 25 February 2025 resolved:

“That:

- 1. Council note the information in this report and the initiatives being considered to support the night-time economy in Wollondilly.*
- 2. Council include the preparation of a Night-time Economy Strategy for Wollondilly in the Draft 2025/26 Delivery Program and Operational Plan.*
- 3. The Tourism and Local Jobs Strategic Reference Group (SRG) have input into the implementation of the strategy, as a project, to ensure the strategy remains grounded in community input and is aligned with the broader objectives of tourism development and local job creation.”*

Risk Assessment

This matter has been assessed against inherent risks outlined in the Risk Appetite Statement and poses no material impact on organisational objectives.

Some of the recommended actions within the draft Strategy may carry inherent risks, however these will be assessed as separate matters when they are pursued.

A key driver in developing the night-time economy in Wollondilly is ensuring the long-term economic viability of our existing towns and villages. With the Wilton Town Centre expected to have the role and function as Wollondilly’s major strategic centre in the coming years providing significant commercial, retail and community services for its future communities, it is crucial that Wilton’s growth does not compete with other towns and villages. Supporting a thriving night-time economy in Picton is a key priority to ensure that both Picton and Wilton Town Centre have complementary roles and functions.

Consultation

Engagement to inform the draft Strategy commenced in March 2024 and continued throughout its development. Local businesses and residents played a central role in shaping the vision, pillars and actions of the draft Strategy, through surveys, workshops, conversations and other engagement activities. This included sessions with the Tourism Advisory Group (June 2024) and Tourism and Local Jobs SRG (August 2025).

Councillors had the opportunity to provide feedback throughout this process, through Councillor Briefings held on 16 May 2024 and 9 September 2025 and through a Councillor Weekly Newsletter item issued on 10 April 2026.

Council deliberately focused on meeting people where they already were, engaging at community events and a Tourism Connect event, and casual drop-in sessions at a local venue and the Performing Arts Centre. This ensured authentic input from those already participating in or benefiting from the night-time economy.

Over the course of this process, more than 100 residents and business owners contributed, along with input from Council’s Picton-based workforce of over 300 staff. Council was recognised for this engagement approach, being awarded a Highly Commended at the Local Government NSW Awards held in August 2025.

A comprehensive summary of the feedback received is provided in the Engagement Report at **Attachment 2**.

It is proposed that the draft Strategy be placed on public exhibition as soon as practicable. During this period, the draft Strategy will be promoted through Council's digital channels and supported by an Engagement Plan to ensure that residents, businesses and key stakeholders are informed to provide feedback.

Engagement will include consultation with relevant Strategic Reference Groups (SRG), local Business Chambers, and the Tourism Connect network.

Following the public exhibition period, feedback on the draft Strategy will be considered and amendments made if considered appropriate, before reporting back to Council for endorsement of the final strategy.

Proposed Interim Parking Position

Through the engagement undertaken in developing the draft Strategy and feedback from existing and prospective businesses, Council's current parking controls have been identified as a barrier to further investment in the Shire. Council has heard that this is a result of a lack of physical on-site availability within the existing built form and high costs for off-site contributions towards parking.

To ensure the Strategy's success, it is crucial to ensure that the overarching vision of the draft Strategy - to encourage investment and activity within the Shire's towns and villages, particularly at night - is able to clearly translate into on-the-ground outcomes for local businesses who wish to invest in the Shire.

In recognising this current misalignment, it is proposed that Council adopt an interim parking position that relaxes the need for certain developments to meet the relevant parking requirements. The proposed interim parking position is to apply to a change of use application only (i.e. where a new business moves into an existing building), and not to newly constructed commercial or mixed-use development.

The following interim parking position is proposed:

"Council will not refuse development consent on the basis of parking, if a development application does not meet the parking requirements outlined within Wollondilly Development Control Plan 2016 Volume 5 Part 2.10.10, if the development application:

- Is a permissible land use within the associated E1 Local Centre zone or RU5 Village zone*
- Proposes a Change of Use to an existing approved building, irrespective of whether the use is intensified or not*
- Site constraints make compliance with parking requirements unreasonable*
- Access to on-street or public parking within the vicinity of the proposal can be demonstrated*

The interim parking position is to apply to all current and future Development Applications, where relevant at the time of Council's endorsement.

The interim parking position does not apply to the following land uses:

- Residential accommodation*
- Boarding houses*

- *Centre-based childcare facilities*
- *Medical Centres*
- *Places of public worship*
- *Public administration buildings*
- *Respite day care centres.*

Where Development Applications do not meet these criteria, Council encourages applicants to participate in a pre-lodgement meeting to discuss parking requirements on a site-specific basis.”

The land uses excluded from the application of the interim parking position listed above are considered sensitive uses that are likely to require site-specific and accessible parking needs. Council's current parking controls will continue to apply to these uses.

The proposed interim parking position will be incorporated as a 'Note' to *Volume 5 Part 2.10.10* of the Wollondilly DCP 2016 and is not considered an amendment, therefore does not require public exhibition.

Should Council resolve to adopt the interim parking position, it will be implemented immediately to current and future development applications, where applicable. The interim parking position is intended to apply until such time that the comprehensive Wollondilly DCP is adopted and in force, which is currently anticipated to occur in July 2028.

At any stage, Council can resolve to reverse the interim parking position if desired, via a Council resolution.

Financial Implications

Funding for the development of the draft Strategy and public exhibition has been considered and allocated within the adopted Operational Budget, noting that the draft Strategy has been delivered in-house.

Further budget, including grant opportunities, will be required to implement some of the recommended actions of the draft Strategy.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Night-time Economy Strategy [**15.1.1** - 32 pages]
2. Engagement Report [**15.1.2** - 65 pages]