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11 March 2023

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Streetscape Plan Towong

May 2024 | Revision F

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We acknowledge and respect Traditional Owners as the traditional custodians of our shared lands, waters and seas. We recognise their unique ability to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection with Country. We honour Elders past, present and emerging, whose knowledge and wisdom will ensure the continuation of culture, and the values which uphold them.

1.0 Background



1.1 Introduction

Project summary

Yonder were engaged by Towong Shire Council (TSC) to work with the community to prepare a Streetscape Plan for the town of Towong which captures the community's aspirations for their town, as well as other existing projects into a consolidated, graphic and easily understood document or 'road-map'. The Streetscape Plan is a high level strategic document to guide future funding applications and on-ground works.

The Streetscape Plan seeks to achieve a design solution which improves safety, functionality, aesthetics, connectivity, pedestrian amenity and traffic movement within the town of Towong.

Key to this was thorough background research coupled with site analysis and the uniquely targeted engagement process, which ensured the outcomes of the Streetscape Plan reflect community aspirations, wants and needs and help create a livable, vibrant environment for town's future.

Objectives

The following objectives also formed part of the Brief:

- incorporate key priorities of the Towong Community Recovery Plan including activation of open spaces and improved walking tracks;
- consider a unified streetscape treatment to better connect key destinations and improve access within the town;
- celebrate the town as a gateway to the Great River Road touring route, as well as natural and cultural heritage; and
- identify a signage strategy for way-finding and interpretation around the town.

Process



1.2 Context

Location

Towong is a small town overlooking the Murray River approximately 11km from Corryong. It is home to the historic Towong Turf Club with other town assets including a hall and a walking track from the Turf Club to the Murray River. It is also a key stopping point for tourists enjoying the Great River Road touring route with a river crossing into NSW. The town has a population of 132 and a median age of 58.

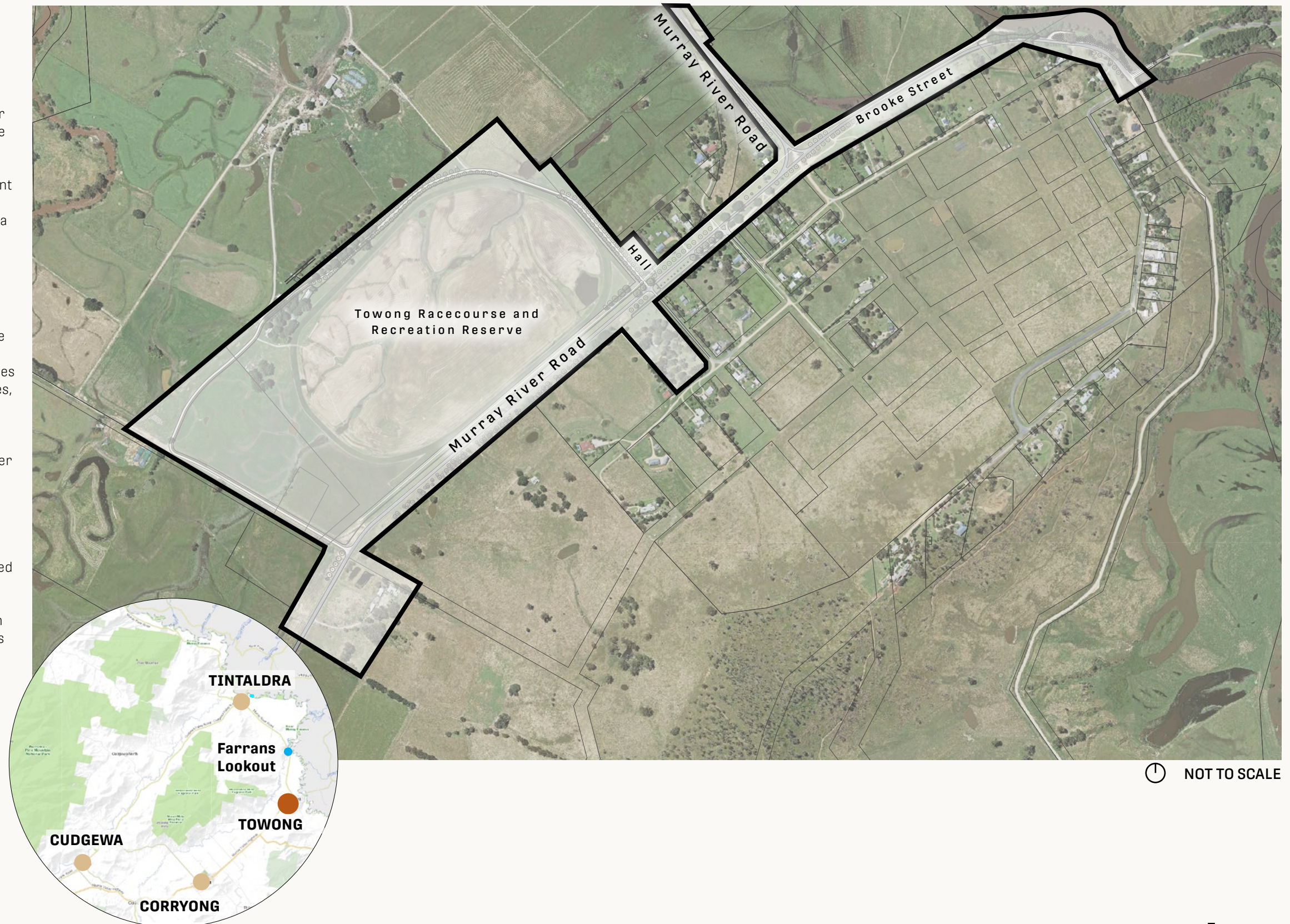
Study area

The study area extends from the Towong Racecourse and Recreation Reserve on Murray River Road including the approach from Tintaldra. It also includes Brooke Street, the new Towong Bridge, road reserves, parks, and public buildings within this area.

The project is also concerned with the macro landscape scale and how Towong connects with other towns and landscape features.

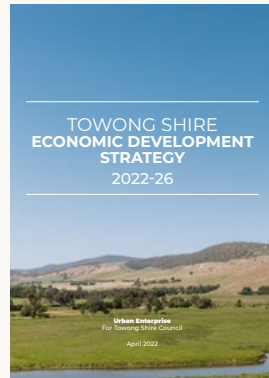
History

The Towong Turf Club has been hosting thoroughbred horse racing since 1871. The racecourse features a gracious historic grandstand which dominates the course and is the oldest free-standing grandstand in Victoria. The town has a number of historic buildings including the Soldiers Memorial Hall.



⌚ NOT TO SCALE

1.3 Policy and strategy



Council plans and strategies

A desktop review of the various strategies, plans and policies identified the following relevant to this project:

Draft Recreation Strategy for Towong Shire 2022-2033

The Strategy identified that to improve opportunities for walking and cycling in Towong Shire, there needs to be a network of cycling and walking trails / paths that are:

- Well designed and safe (even surfaces, wide enough pathways, well lit, clear lines of site, separation from vehicles, well maintained).
- Connected to key locations people want to visit.
- Well signed.

The Strategy also identified:

- Higher levels of participation in equine activities and subsequent equine infrastructure in Towong Shire compared with many other Shires, e.g. Tintaldra and Corryong Recreation Reserves.
- Gaps in the trail network and opportunities to better connect towns with one another (e.g. Corryong and Tintaldra).
- Poor way-finding signage to many of the recreation reserves in the Shire.
- Lack of infrastructure that could help to further activate sites, e.g. paths, seats, shade, picnic tables, water bubblers and play equipment.

Towong Shire Council Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

The Plan identifies a number of actions to a safe and healthy community:

- Review and deliver the strategic parks and playgrounds upgrade program.
- Complete streetscape upgrade in Towong.
- Map and publish walking and cycling trails that connect townships, link destinations and create circular routes.

Towong Shire Destination Management Plan

The Plan identifies a number of tourism themes for Towong Shire, namely:

- Theme 1 accommodation: Cudgewa valley for wellness retreat.
- Theme 3 nature and water: Multi-day canoe trail from Towong to Bellbridge.
- Theme 4 ride: High country rail trail improvement and extension: Shelley to Corryong.
- Theme 6: branding marketing and awareness - Shire-wide: Build on the brand framework project currently being delivered by Tourism North East to deliver a consistent branding approach aligned to market understanding of the Shire.

The Plan also recommends that a signage strategy to be developed focusing on a cohesive brand approach, clear connection to place, improved hierarchy of signage, and removal of outdated and obsolete signage.

Towong Shire Settlement Strategy - 2010

The Strategy recommends that all residential development is retained within the existing extent of the town with the retention of existing Low Density Residential Zone in its current form.

Towong Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026

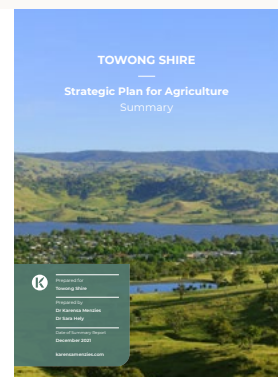
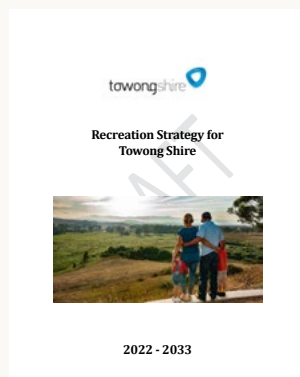
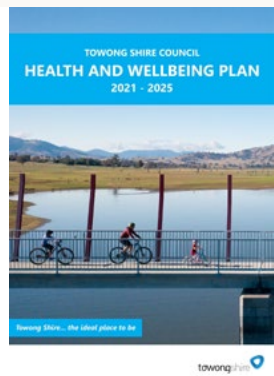
This Strategy identifies a number of themes for economic development, notably economic growth through visitation.

The Strategy also talks about improving livability outcomes for residents as an economic development objective.

Other strategies

A desktop review of the following strategies, plans and policies were also reviewed.

- The Council Plan
- UM2030 Plan
- Municipal recovery plan
- Community emergency management plans
- Tree management plan
- Town entry signage plan (in development) and Standard signage strategy
- Strategic Plan for Agriculture



1.4 Strengths, issues and opportunities - photo study

The following photo study demonstrates site assessment and analysis of Towong and its context.

Strengths



Community led improvements: The Towong Walking Track provides pedestrian access to the river.



A community space: the Towong Racecourse and Recreation Reserve is a key community gathering space.



A rich history: The grandstand is an iconic landmark identifying the town.



Proximity and access to the Murray River: the new Towong Bridge provides improved vehicular and pedestrian access.

Issues and opportunities



Staged removal of woody weeds and restricted vehicle access would improve the river environment.



Amenities building are proposed as part of the Towong Racecourse improvements; better way-finding and access is required from the road.



Proposed landscape improvements to the Soldiers Memorial Hall could extend into the road reserve and recreation reserve entry.

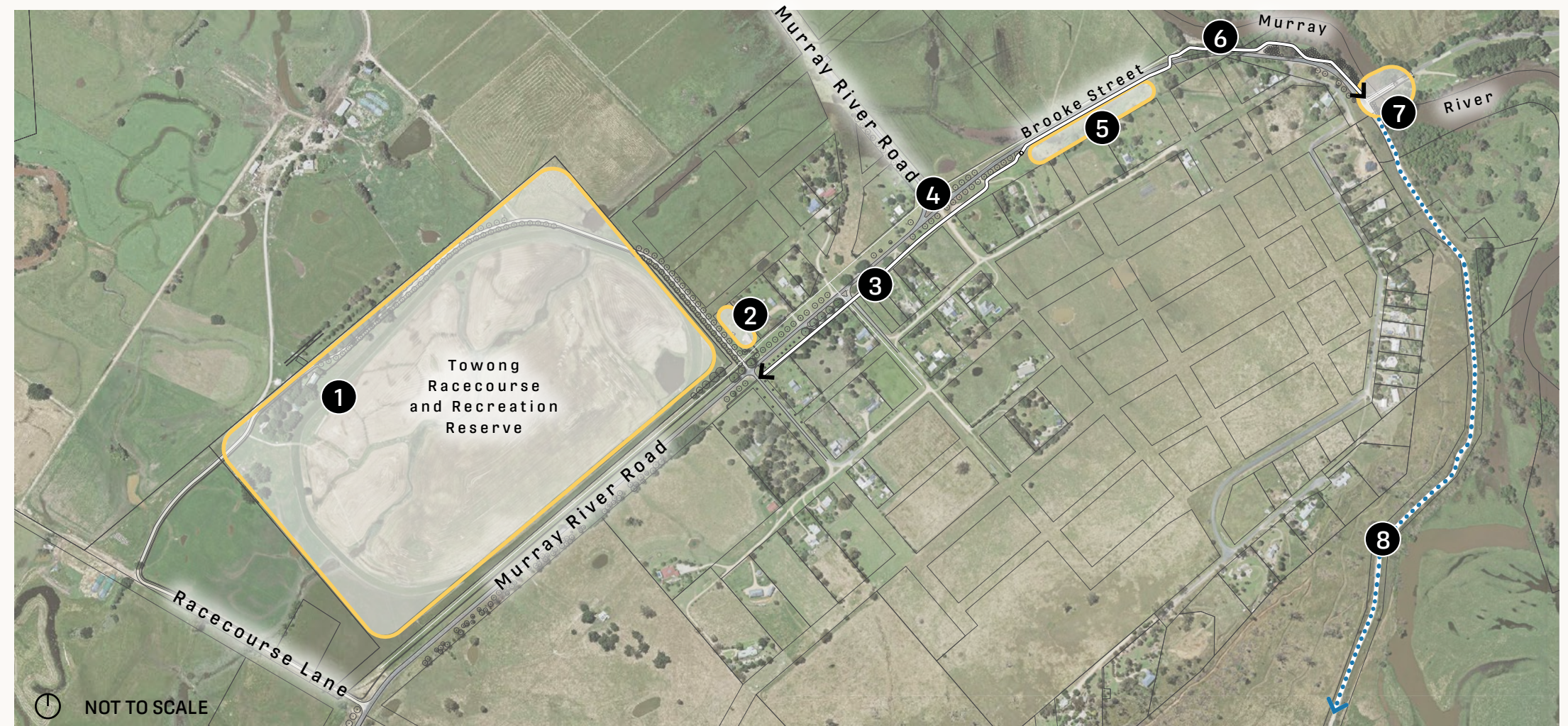


The old school site and tennis courts provides an opportunity for a future community space.

1.5 Existing plans and projects

Towong was devastated by the Black Summer Bushfires in 2019/20 with 4 primary residences destroyed, another 4 damaged, 68 properties impacted and 14 sheds either destroyed or damaged. The iconic Towong Racecourse and Hall were undamaged, however the historic Towong Hill Station homestead was completely destroyed leaving an ongoing sense of grief and loss for the community. Through the Bushfire Recovery process, the community have come together to form the Towong Community Recovery Committee and produced a Community Recovery Plan with several key priorities.

Other projects such as the Great River Road Stage 2 and Towong bridge replacement are also captured.



1

Towong Racecourse and Recreation Reserve improvements project

A new amenities building and septic system is proposed. Not yet constructed. Partnership between Towong Turf Club, Recreation Reserve and Council to explore funding and delivery options.

2

Soldiers Memorial Hall - Towong Community Recovery Project

The renovation of the Hall includes essential works to ensure the sustainability of the building, increase venue hire, reduce maintenance needs and increase accessibility. Also includes a deck and awning to the rear of the Hall and an outdoor community space. Currently under construction.

3

Great River Road Project Stage 2 - Towong Community Recovery project

The Towong Walking Track connects the community from the centre of the township to the river front. Currently under construction.

4

Towong Junction

The Towong Community Recovery Committee have requested that the 90 degree bend at Murray River Road and Brooke Street intersection is re-aligned and the speed limit from Murray Valley Highway to the village is reduced. Initial design has been undertaken by Council. Not yet funded - possible future black spot funding application.

5

Towong Billabong and sculpture

A community-driven project, the sculpture of brolgas is proposed in the billabong adjacent to the Towong Walking Track.

6

River recovery - Towong Community Recovery project

Clearing and rehabilitation of the Towong Wetland Reserve/local swimming beach area. In progress.

7

Towong Bridge replacement

This project has recently been completed.

8

Towong Hill Road walking trail

Including Strzelecki road side monument Not yet funded.

2.0 Preliminary ideas



2.1 Preliminary ideas for streetscape opportunities

Preliminary ideas for streetscape opportunities plans were developed as part of the second stage of this project. High level plans were developed which identified ongoing projects and previously identified opportunities as well as future opportunities, and were based on the following four principles/themes.



Green infrastructure

Implement a street tree strategy, which acknowledges history, community aspirations and also provide succession planting appropriate for a changing climate.

Future opportunities identified:

- Boulevard street tree planting - Racecourse Lane.
- Street tree planting - Murray River Road.
- Shade trees to Towong Walking Track.
- Replacement of deciduous trees at river front.



Circulation and amenity

Prioritise the pedestrian by improving tracks, paths and providing seating, shade and lighting.

Future opportunities identified:

- Continue expansion of the walking track to the Hall and new bridge.
- Provide resting spots.
- Create a shared path between landscape features and towns.



Story-telling and way-finding

Strengthen identity and legibility by introducing entry features, directional and interpretive signage, as well as a cohesive suite of street furniture.

Future opportunities identified:

- Reinforce the sense of arrival by providing new entry element.
- Promote the 'Racecourse to the Murray Walk' (www.walkingmaps.com.au/walk/5660).
- Introduce a suite of interpretive signage, as well as town map and markers for points of interest within the township.
- Investigate possible statue of racehorse 'Trafalgar'.



Key destinations

Activate public spaces for community use and gathering.

Future opportunities identified:

- Investigate traffic safety issues at Murray River Road intersection. Remove plantings which impede sight lines and beautify the traffic island.
- Improve the river front at Towong River Reserve by separating vehicles and pedestrians (bollards). Provide picnic area, furniture and shade. Install 'no camping' signs.
- Upgrade noticeboard, provide book exchange and seating to AusPost mailbox area.
- Towong Tennis Courts / school site as a potential alternative site for a public toilet. Other ideas include community garden, outdoor exercise equipment, pump track, basketball court and playspace for bigger kids.

3.0 Engagement findings



3.1 Round 1: Preliminary Ideas for Streetscape Opportunities

Yonder met with a group of three interested community members on the 4 May 2023 (including members from the Community Recovery Committee) for an informal discussion and site walk. With the Preliminary Ideas for Streetscape Opportunities plans in hand, we sought to gain feedback about the preliminary ideas, and discuss other on-going projects, issues and opportunities.

The following ideas were discussed:

Summary of community feedback

Green infrastructure	– Small shade trees are not required along Towong Walking Track.
	– Keep the intersection of Murray River Road and Brooke Street clear of street trees.
	– Consider selective vegetation removal to expose the original trees on the south side of Murray River Road opposite the recreation reserve.
	– Reinstate Towong's avenue of honour along Murray River Road and Brooke Street - consult with elders in the town.
	– The south west corner of the racecourse is poorly drained - street trees should be selected to suit.
	– Consider avenue tree planting along Racecourse Lane to the entry of the racecourse.
Circulation and amenity	– Keep open views to the racecourse on the north side of Murray River Road.
	– Remove Poplar tree at the Soldiers Memorial Hall.
	– Provide a walking track around the Recreation Reserve.
	– Provide a new path connection from the beach area to Towong Bridge.
Story-telling and way-finding	– Consider a reduction in speed limit to 60km/hr within the town centre.
	– Liaise with VicRoads to review and rationalise road signage and reduce visual clutter.
	– Agree with a sculptural landmark entry feature - grandstand as a suggestion.
Key destinations	– Provide an additional entry element at the approach from Towong Bridge.
	– Capture the proposed changes to Soldiers Memorial Hall surrounds including covered deck, pergola, possible future playground, fencing and parking. Little appetite for a public toilet in the grounds of the Hall.
	– Capture proposed changes to racecourse including new amenities building and septic system. Improve access and way-finding to racecourse for public use of new amenities buildings. Provide a dump point at the racecourse to service campers.
	– Little appetite for a boat ramp or fish cleaning facilities. Capture proposed improvements to the riverfront including bollards, picnic tables and revegetation.
	– New mailboxes are not required, however a book exchange was suggested at this location.
	– The old school site/tennis courts are DWELP controlled. It was suggested that a community garden and other active uses of the site could be developed in the future.



Community noticeboard requires replacement.



A walking path around the racecourse has been suggested.



Vehicle access at the riverfront needs to be controlled.



A pedestrian link between the beach area and the new bridge is required.

4.0 The Streetscape Plan



4.1 Design objectives

The Streetscape Plan builds on recent improvements in the town and will help to further define and retain the community's identity and economic vitality through a vibrant, safe and attractive public realm.

Six design objectives have been formulated which underpins the Draft Streetscape Plan. The principles are based on the outcomes of the site assessment, data review and community feedback from the initial 'Preliminary Ideas' stage.



Objective 1: **Reinforce sense of place**

Celebrate Towong's heritage, equine history, community spirit and unique natural environment. Create an iconic town gateway at the western and southern approaches to Murray River Road and at the end of Towong Bridge.

Strengthen the town's identity and legibility through way-finding and interpretive signage. Rationalise the signage styles and review locations of existing interpretive signage panels.



Objective 2: **Green the streets**

Soften, cool and green the streets with street tree and garden bed planting to create a more attractive and comfortable environment, providing shade, biodiversity and ameliorating heat island effect.

Implement an ongoing street tree planting program in the town, which provide succession planting appropriate for a changing climate.

Build on recent street tree planting and continue along Murray River Road and Brooke Street.



Objective 3: **Prioritise the pedestrian**

Create a safe and comfortable environment for the pedestrian. Rationalise and define car parking areas at the Soldiers Memorial Hall and river front precinct.

Provide a designated location for pedestrians to cross road at the Soldiers Memorial Hall. Improve tracks and footpaths.



Objective 4: **Unified design**

Implement a consistent treatment of paving, furniture and signage to improve the appearance and visually unify the town.

Upgrade existing and install new street furniture, and provide clear way-finding signage. Draw on Council's existing suite of street furniture as appropriate.



Objective 5: **Activate public spaces**

Investigate opportunities for new or improved public spaces for community use and gathering.

Introduce additional social infrastructure to the Soldiers Memorial Hall surrounds, such as a new playground, shelter with BBQ and deck.

Enhance visitor experience of the river front precinct with formalised parking and picnic settings.

Consider the development of a community garden, outdoor exercise equipment and pump track at the old school site/tennis courts.



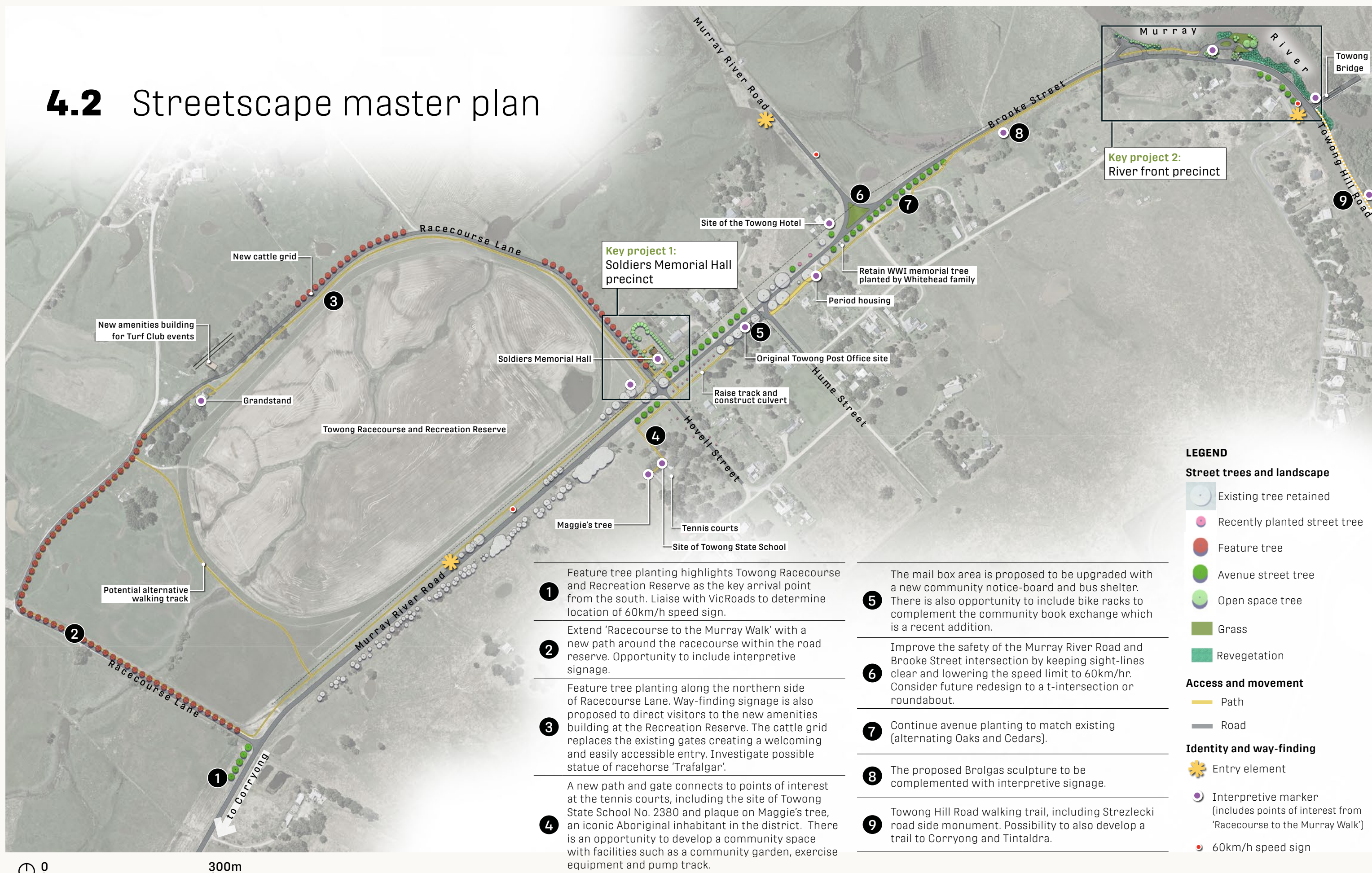
Objective 6: **Improve access**

Improve way-finding and access to the proposed amenities building at the Towong Racecourse and Recreation Reserve.

Provide new path connections and parking at the Soldiers Memorial Hall, to complement the current Hall improvement works.

Connect Towong Bridge to the river front precinct with a new path and steps.

4.2 Streetscape master plan



0 300m

4.3 Key project 1: Soldiers Memorial Hall precinct

Design objective

Support the refurbished Soldiers Memorial Hall as a key community gathering place. Provide pedestrian connections, parking, new community infrastructure such as sheltered picnic area and new playground.

Recommendations

Pedestrian access and parking

- 1 Improve pedestrian access by providing new path access to the Soldiers Memorial Hall from Murray River Road and Racecourse Lane. Designated parking is proposed near the path with disabled car spaces as required.

- 2 Remove existing poplar tree.

Community infrastructure

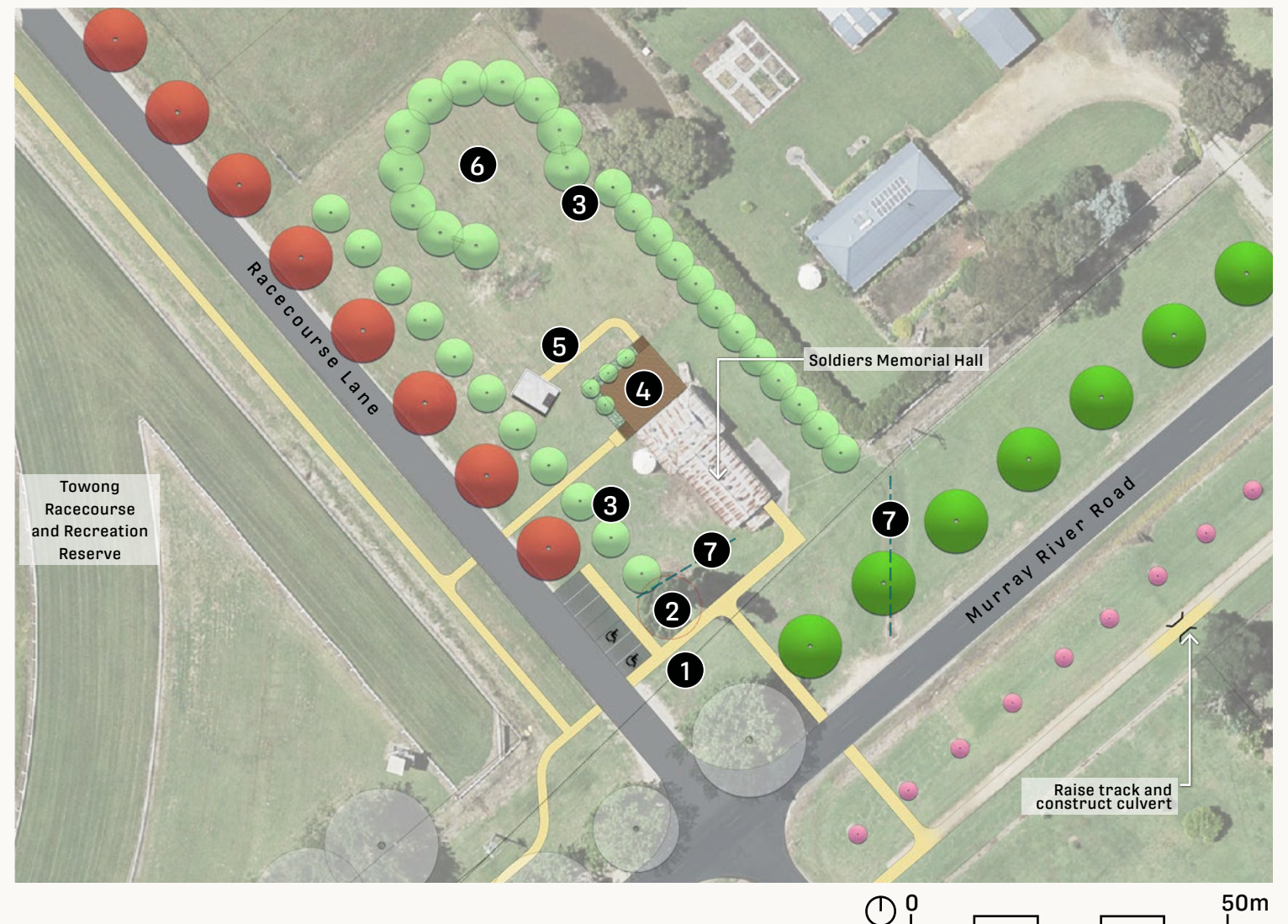
- 3 Provide new trees in the open space for improved shade around the new community outdoor space.

- 4 New garden bed and small trees to proposed deck area north of the refurbished Soldiers Memorial Hall.

- 5 New path connecting proposed BBQ area from the proposed deck area.

- 6 Future potential playground for hall users with play equipment in organic softfall surrounded by shade trees.

- 7 The open drainage swales south are proposed to be converted to underground drainage subject to outfall requirements.



LEGEND

	Feature street tree		path		Deck
	Recently planted street tree		Road		Concrete
	Boulevard tree		Planting		Planting
	Open space tree				

4.4 Key project 2: River front precinct



4.5 Entry element concept



Artist impression of possible entry element (concept only)