

# Whitsunday Regional Council Local Housing Action Plan

Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027





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### **Partnership Acknowledgement**

The Whitsunday Local Housing Action Plan was developed by Whitsunday Regional Council with the support of the Queensland Government in association with the Local Government Association of Queensland

### **Disclaimer**

The Whitsunday Regional Council Local Housing Action Plan is a non-statutory plan and 'living document' prepared under the Queensland Housing & Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 (Action 5) to support local housing outcomes. This Local Housing Action Plan is not the same as a Housing Strategy under the State Planning Policy, or a housing study, but may inform statutory documents like a planning scheme.

### **Acknowledgement**

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future and acknowledge their ongoing relationship and connection to Country. Whitsunday Regional Council endorses the vision of a nation which values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, cultures and peoples and recognises their distinct position as the original custodians of Australia.

Council's Mission is to make a sustainable future possible by building stronger relationships, mutual respect and encouraging cultural practices that strengthen and support harmony between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community within the Whitsunday Region. Council values input and active participation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into decision-making.

The five traditional owner groups within the Whitsundays are Ngaro, Gia, Juru, Jangga and Birrah. The Whitsunday Regional Council is committed to working with all traditional owner groups in creating and supporting genuine First Nation housing outcomes.

### **Version Control**

This document was endorsed by Whitsunday Regional Council at its Ordinary Meeting on 28 August 2024.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Local Housing Action Plan

This Local Housing Action Plan (the Plan) is developed through a joint initiative involving the Queensland Government, Whitsunday Regional Council (WRC) and the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) to respond to housing challenges in the Whitsunday Regional Council Area.

This is an iterative process (see Figure 1) that does not intend to duplicate existing actions of Council or the actions under the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 or the State 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 needs.



Figure 1: The Local Housing Action Plan Iterative Process

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 WRC, state agencies, private and not-for-profit organisations; and
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.

## 1.2 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:

- Regional infrastructure plans;
- Whitsundays Regional Council Planning Scheme 2017;
- 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 agencies as required.
- The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027 and the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025;
- Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook 2023; and
- Greater Whitsunday Housing Summit Action Plan 2023 (GWC Action Plan).

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.

### 1.3 Greater Whitsundays Community Housing Summit

Greater Whitsunday Communities (GWC) is a strategic regional social and community development organisation in the Whitsunday, Isaac, and Mackay region. GWC works with people to enhance their capacity and quality of life within their community. Their work is primarily underpinned by participatory community development practice, a concept that supports communities to have a voice in the development of sustainable practices.

In mid-2022 GWC and RDA Greater Whitsunday (RDA GW) partnered to initiate a Housing Project to identify potential collaborative solutions to the housing stress being faced in the Greater Whitsunday region that regional stakeholders agree to and could mobilise around. As part of the project, several key activities have been delivered including:

- **December 2022 – February 2023** | GWC and RDA GW delivered a Housing Roundtable (Roundtable) with the aim of identifying the strategic themes and priorities to inform a Research Project and Housing Summit. A key outcome from the Roundtable was the release of the [Greater Whitsunday Communities Housing Roundtable Report](#) in February 2023.
- **March – July 2023** | GWC and RDA GW commissioned Urbis to articulate the housing issues being experienced in the Greater Whitsunday Region with baseline data – both quantitative and qualitative—to inform the Greater Whitsunday Housing Summit. The research report identifies current and future housing needs, explores opportunities, and makes recommendations for action to enable future decision-making and advocacy for better housing outcomes in the region. On 12 July 2023 the [Greater Whitsunday Housing Project Playbook](#) was released.
- **August 2023** | On 15 August 2023, GWC held a Housing Summit (Summit) in Mackay that sought to develop solutions to the Mackay, Isaac, and Whitsunday regions' housing issues in line with the priorities identified at the Housing Roundtable. GWC and RDA GW provided stakeholders with a [suite of resources](#) to prepare for discussions. The Summit attracted approximately 170 participants, including the Minister for Housing, Meaghan Scanlon, the Mayors of the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday Regional Councils, their CEOs and many council officers, representatives of organisations across the housing supply chain, homeless service providers, social and affordable housing providers, developers, real estate agents and employers. Following robust discussions at the Summit, GWC released a *Greater Whitsunday Housing Summit Action Plan* (Action Plan) that summarises the prioritised solutions identified at the Summit.

The Action Plan prepared by GWC nominates several key stakeholders to deliver action items, including the Whitsunday Regional Council. However, GWC notes that the confirmation of these stakeholders' participation is still pending. As part of the preparation of the Whitsunday Local Housing Action Plan, the Whitsunday Regional Council has noted the GWC Action Plan and incorporated relevant items within this LHAP.

## 2. Key Facts

### 2.1 The Whitsunday Region

The Whitsunday Regional Council has a total land area of 23,876km<sup>2</sup> with an estimated resident population of 39,712 as of June 2023<sup>1</sup>. Since the previous year, the population has grown by 3.12%. This is higher than population growth in Regional QLD which was 2.16% for the same time period.<sup>2</sup> The population is estimated to grow to above 50,000 by 2046<sup>3</sup>. Functional population however is significantly higher when the non-resident population is considered. Census data collected in 2021 suggests actual residents and non-residents on census night was closer to 50,000. If this trend continues the Whitsunday Council needs to plan and accommodate a population and non-resident population closer to 70,000 by 2046.

The region encompasses the four main townships of Greater Airlie Beach (includes Cannonvale), Bowen, Collinsville and Proserpine with numerous rural and coastal communities and residential areas scattered throughout the region. These towns have distinct roles and each face unique housing related challenges. The 74 Whitsunday Islands are also within the Council area. Many of these islands are uninhabited national parks, however several offer a variety of resort accommodation, all with the Great Barrier Reef and fringing coral reefs at their doorstep.

## 2.2 Key Housing Characteristics

### 2.2.1 Dwellings by structure

Separate houses are the most dominant form of dwellings by structure and accounted for 91.2% of dwellings counted during the 2021 Census. This is significantly higher than Queensland (74.8%) but is in line with similar regional government areas where lower density housing is more common. This higher proportion of separate houses also leads to lower proportions of apartments (1.9%) and semi-detached (4.6%) homes when compared to Queensland (12.5% and 11.7% respectively).

Within the LGA, 79% of homes have at least one bedroom spare and 47% have at least two bedrooms spare.<sup>4</sup> Analysis of the household/family types in Whitsunday Regional Council area in 2021 compared to Regional QLD shows that there was a lower proportion of couple families with child(ren) as well as a lower proportion of one-parent families. Overall, 21.1% of total families were couple families with child(ren), and 8.2% were one-parent families, compared with 25.2% and 10.8% respectively for Regional QLD.

There were a lower proportion of lone person households and a lower proportion of couples without children. Overall, the proportion of lone person households was 22.4% compared to 23.4% in Regional QLD while the proportion of couples without children was 25.6% compared to 27.3% in Regional QLD.<sup>5</sup>

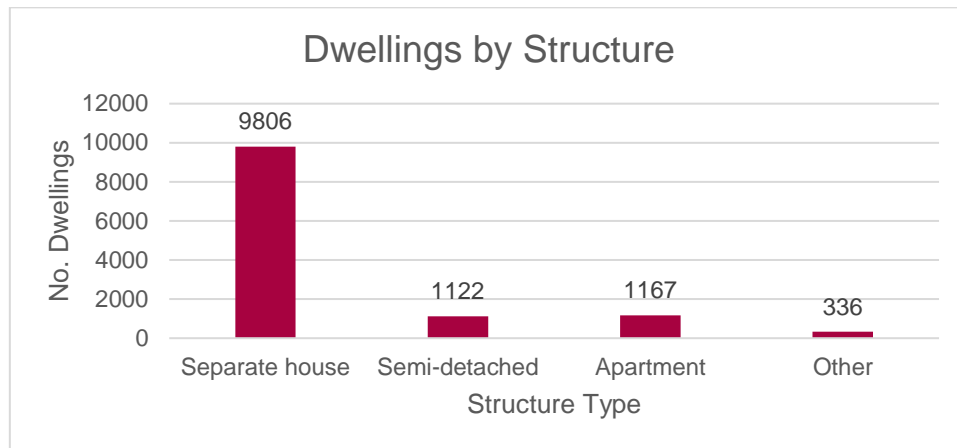
<sup>1</sup> ABS ERP 2023

<sup>2</sup> .id (informed decisions) for Whitsunday Regional Council

<sup>3</sup> QGSO projected population (medium series) 2023

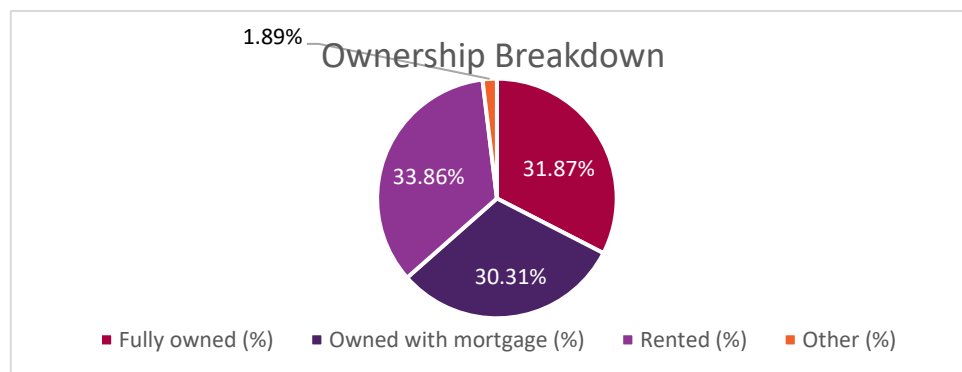
<sup>4</sup> Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook 2023

<sup>5</sup> .id (informed decisions) for Whitsunday Regional Council

Figure 2 – Dwelling by Structure<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2.2 Ownership breakdown

The 2021 census data recorded a 31.87% home ownership, with 30.31% owned with mortgage and 33.86% rented. This rate of home ownership is similar to the rest of Queensland, which is 29.1%.

Figure 3 – Ownership Breakdown<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2.3 Renting

The median rental price for a 4-bedroom house is \$762 in Airlie Beach and \$660 in Proserpine which is significantly higher than the Queensland median of \$600 per week. The median rental price in Bowen is lower than the Queensland median at \$490 per week.

Rental Type	Greater Airlie Beach 4802	Proserpine 4800	Bowen 4805	Queensland
4 Bedroom House	\$762 p/w	\$660 p/w	\$490 p/w	\$600 p/w
2 Bedroom Unit	\$465 p/w	\$300 p/w	\$325 p/w	\$500 p/w

Table 1 - Median rental across the region and Queensland.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – 2021 Census Data Whitsunday LGA

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – 2021 Census Data Whitsunday LGA

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Housing Profiles: Whitsunday Region LGA (ASGS 2021)

## 2.2.4 Property sales and pricing

In the 12 months ending 31 March 2023 there were 948 detached dwelling sales in the Whitsunday region and 481 attached dwellings sold.

The median house prices across the region are higher than the Queensland median of \$550,000 with the exception of Proserpine, Bowen and Collinsville which are below the Queensland median.

	Airlie Beach	Cannonvale	Proserpine	Jubilee Pocket	Bowen	Collinsville	Queensland
Median house price	\$1.2M	\$687K	\$404K	\$626K	\$400K	\$160K	\$550K
Median unit price	\$499K	343K	\$175K	\$300K	\$280K	-	\$424K
Properties sold	118	348	68	57	343	64	133K

Table 2 – Median sales price – May '23 – April '24<sup>9</sup>

## 2.3 Whitsunday Housing Need

### 2.3.1 Housing stress

The 30:40 indicator identifies households as being in housing affordability stress when the household has an income level in the bottom 40 per cent of Australia's income distribution and is paying more than 30 per cent of its income in housing costs.

Figure 4 following shows that 1,265 renters are paying more than 30% of household income to rent and 489 homeowners are paying more than 30% of household income on mortgage repayments. As housing stress grows within the region many more households will need to look for cheaper accommodation and place increasing demands on social housing providers for support. Whitsunday will need to look to support more social housing supply opportunities and deliver market strategies to increase supply to stabilise rental increase pressure.

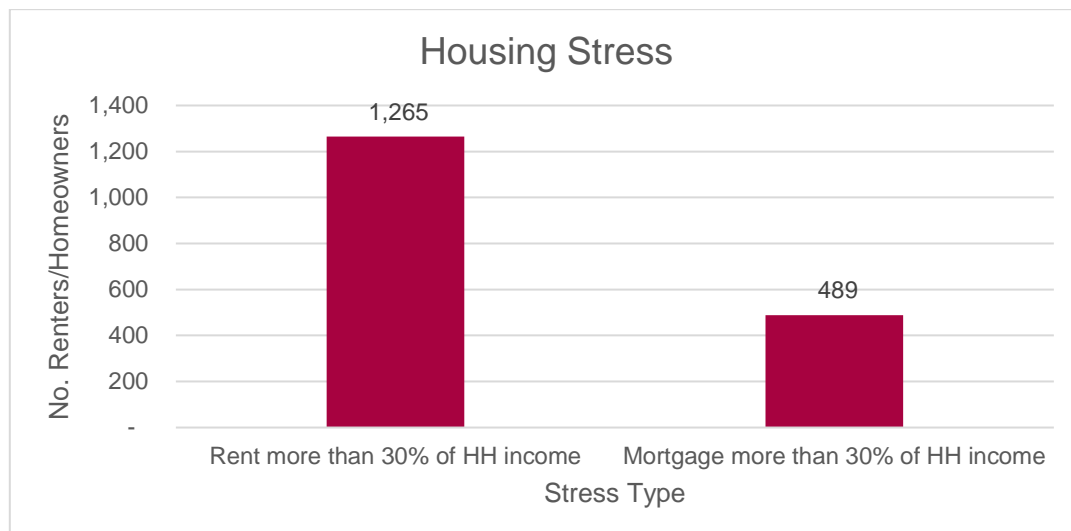


Figure 4 – Housing Stress<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Property Value by corelogic

<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – 2021 Census Data Whitsunday LGA



### 2.3.2 Housing delivery pressures

There are a number of key contributing factors influencing the housing supply issues in the Whitsunday Region. Figure 5 below provides an overview of the general housing pressures that are being felt across the Whitsunday LGA.

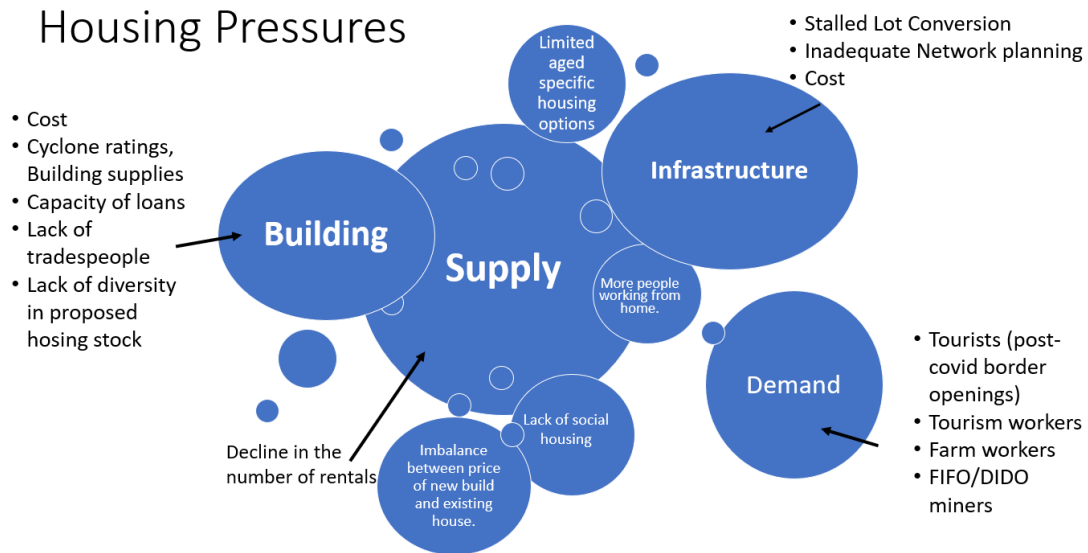


Figure 5 – General Housing pressures in the Whitsunday LGA

The broad drivers for housing challenges vary across the key growth areas of the region. Building cost and supply of builders are a key challenge region wide. This is impacting the delivery of additional housing supply to keep up with demand. Lack of housing supply refers to actual supply of homes rather than availability of developable land supply which has not been identified as an issue.

## 3. WRC Key Focus Areas

The following key areas of focus have been determined through a review of existing data and engagement with Council stakeholders:

- Housing affordability
  - Aged persons housing
  - Worker's accommodation (including key workers and tourism workers).
  - Tourist accommodation
  - Critical worker housing (including state and local government)
  - First Nations housing
  - Social housing
  - Homelessness
- Housing diversity and density
- Trunk/critical infrastructure planning and delivery.

These focus areas have been expanded on below and will be considered when identifying and prioritising actions.

### 3.1 Housing Affordability

Like many areas of Queensland, the Whitsunday region is experiencing a housing crisis. In recent years housing affordability has declined across the Whitsunday region, due to a combination of rising house and rental prices and a decrease in the available stock for sale or rent for residents.

Affordable housing is a term used to describe housing being provided at a price point that is determined to be affordable for specific household incomes and/or employment types. As affordable housing can include a range of housing types, tenures and price points, subcategories with key needs have been identified and expanded on further.

The Rental Affordability Index published by SGS Economics and Planning 2022, focuses on the key household types for whom rental affordability may be an issue. The index looks at indicative incomes (for select groups) and the actual rents for different dwellings sizes that could be considered appropriate. The index produces a number which indicates affordability according to the following scale.

	RAI score	Affordability
	200+	Very Affordable
	150-200	Affordable
	120-150	Acceptable
	100-120	Moderately Unaffordable
	80-100	Unaffordable
	50-80	Severely Unaffordable
	50 or less	Extremely Unaffordable

Table 3 – SGS Rental Affordability Index, November 2022<sup>11</sup>

On average, Greater Airlie Beach was rated as moderately unaffordable, however for low-income households including pensioner couples and single part-time worker parents, it was rated as 'severely unaffordable'. Bowen and Proserpine were both rated as "unaffordable" for 'Single part-time worker parent on benefits.' Pensioner couples across all major areas are rated as "unaffordable". With data indicating in Airlie Beach singles on benefits rate as "extremely unaffordable", data is unavailable for the other regional centres of Bowen, Proserpine, and Collinsville however it is assumed that rental unaffordability for singles on benefits would be similar.

	Airlie Beach	Bowen	Collinsville	Proserpine
Single pensioner	59	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pensioner couple	66	73	n/a	83
Single person on benefits	34	n/a	n/a	n/a
Single part time worker parent on benefits	58	80	n/a	90
Single full-time working parent	132	183	n/a	204
Single income couple with children	105	147	184	134
Dual Income couple with children	210	288	390	270
Student share-house	86	124	160	114
Minimum wage couple	112	161	n/a	187
Hospitality worker	104	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Avg – All households/ Dwellings</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>132</b>

Table 4 – SGS Rental Affordability Index, November 2022-2023<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> SGS Rental Affordability Index, November 2022- November 2023

<sup>12</sup> SGS Rental Affordability Index, November 2022- November 2023

## Vacancy rates & rentals

Limited housing availability, high demand, and consistently low vacancy rates have led to increased pressure on weekly rents. Airlie Beach, from late 2020 to April 2023, has experienced its most prolonged period of extremely low vacancy rates, with the vacancy rate hitting a mere 1.0 percent in April 2023, and dropping to as low as 0.2 percent in the past year. Similarly, Proserpine also witnessed a significant decrease in rental vacancy, with rates as low as 0.1 percent in August 2022.<sup>13</sup>

A significant housing pressure is the decline in the number of rental properties for residents. For much of the period between 2012 to late 2020 the numbers of rental bonds were steady or increasing in Airlie Beach, Bowen and Proserpine. However, since the start of 2021, the total number of bonds held in all three of these markets has declined sharply. For instance, in December 2020, there were slightly over 2,000 rental bonds recorded in Greater Airlie Beach, and by December 2022, this number had decreased to 1,650. This represents a remarkable 18.7 percent reduction in rental properties in just a span of two years. Similarly, there were corresponding declines of 17.1 percent in Bowen and 15.1 percent in Proserpine. It's possible that some of these residences might have transitioned from being previously rented to being owner-occupied or converted into short-term accommodation, although there is a lack of evidence to confirm this.<sup>14</sup>

## Increased prices

While most affordability analyses look at the private rental market, it is important to understand that there is a ladder of opportunity across all housing markets.

House prices across the region have registered strong growth in the last two years. PRD Whitsundays Property Market Update found that in Q4 2023, Greater Airlie Beach (postcode 4802 includes properties between Cannonvale and Shute Harbour) recorded a median house price of \$750,000, and a median unit price of \$345,000. This represents an annual (Q4 2022 – Q4 2023) price growth of 14.1% for houses and 4.1% for units.

Households with the financial capacity to purchase a home are typically viewed as being in an acceptable affordability position. However, as more households face challenges in obtaining finance or finding affordable homes for purchase, this tends to elevate the demand for rental properties. Consequently, it places strain on the rental market and lower-income households, pushing them further down the affordability index.

## Supply

A common measure of affordability considers an individual's income compared to the cost of their housing, but it is also important to consider the availability or supply of housing.

In Airlie Beach there has been a clear fall in the number of available listings from the long-term average of around 450 dwellings on the market at any given time, to just 240 in April 2023. This decline in available stock corresponds quite clearly with increasing property prices, suggesting that the lack of available supply is contributing to the decline in affordable housing. Bowen and Proserpine are also experiencing this trend.

Broad consultation with Council stakeholders and community experts found that there was widespread agreement that the current shortage and cost of housing is unprecedented. The situation has worsened considerably since the census was undertaken. For instance, rental availability has declined by 15% over the last two years. Inquires for housing made through charities have increased fivefold in recent years, reflecting the increasing numbers of people who cannot pay market rates for housing<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> SQM Research

<sup>14</sup> Rental Tenancies Authority Quarterly Data

<sup>15</sup> SQM Research

### 3.1.1 Aged persons housing

The Whitsunday region has an ageing population. The most rapidly expanding age category from 2011 to 2021 was people aged 55 and above. This demographic shift is driven by a combination of aging in place, and the influx of older individuals migrating to the region. Together, these age groups contributed to almost two-thirds of the overall net population growth from 2016 to 2021. This trend is predicted to continue.

Households in the region with aging residents typically exhibit a limited inclination to downsize to smaller dwellings that better meet their requirements. Instead, older households often choose to remain in their family homes, utilizing spare bedrooms for visits from family, or converting them into storage/hobby rooms. Downsizing rates tend to rise primarily in the population aged 75 and above, when maintaining a larger dwelling becomes challenging. This trend is influenced by factors such as the financial costs, the mental and physical burdens associated with moving, and the scarcity of affordable, well-located, low-maintenance alternative housing options.

#### Existing Initiatives

Council currently offers donations on Rates and Charges for Not-for-Profit organisations used primarily for aged care accommodation through the [Donations Policy](#).

#### Response Opportunities

There is opportunity for all levels of government to investigate options to facilitate/ incentivise development of housing appropriate for aged persons (e.g smaller housing typologies and retirement facilities). It is expected that any increase in diverse housing options would assist in better utilising existing housing stock with 79% of homes in the region having at least one bedroom spare and 47% having at least two bedrooms spare. Incentivising and facilitating over 55's and aged care facilities in the region may encourage single occupants in larger homes to downsize.

### 3.1.2 Worker's accommodation

The horticultural area on the Don River flood plain west of Bowen is the largest producer of winter vegetables in Queensland and is worth \$650 million per year. It is estimated that 20% of Bowen's regional workforce is supported by the industry. Crops include tomatoes, corn, capsicums, beans, melons and mangoes. 1,500 people are employed throughout the year with an additional 1,500 people employed in planting season (March to May), 2,000 in the harvesting season (August - late October) which coincides with the peak tourism season in Bowen. Prior to Covid, the industry relied on seasonal backpacker employment. Consultation with local businesses in Bowen indicates that the backpacker void, resulting from Covid, has now been filled partially by Pacific Islander workers.

While some existing worker accommodations are available on farms, there is a growing need for elevated housing standards for temporary workers. As a result, farmers are increasingly turning to rental housing in Bowen, creating competition with local residents. Additionally, the upturn in the coal mining activity inland has led to increased employment on the railways and at Abbot Point resulting in more residents moving to Bowen, increasing demand for already scarce housing. This pressure is only expected to increase if plans to expand the aquacultural industry (increasing employee numbers significantly) goes ahead without considering housing needs upfront of expansion as it may be difficult to attract the work force required.

In December 2022, the Planning Regulation 2017 was amended to give effect to the Queensland Rural Workers' Accommodation Initiative that allows for small scale rural workers' accommodation for less than 20 employees to proceed without needing planning approval. Unfortunately, most rural properties find it exceedingly challenging to meet the eligibility criteria for this exemption. In order to qualify for an exemption and avoid the need for a material change of use, no areas of the property can be subject to flood hazard, bushfire, or landslide hazard mapping/overlays. This requirement rules out majority of rural properties.



Council is also aware of difficulties tourism and hospitality industry workers are facing with securing housing. In Greater Airlie Beach about 20% of the workforce work directly in tourism. There is anecdotal evidence of a lack of housing appropriate for this cohort, particularly within Greater Airlie Beach.

### Response Opportunities

Council to advocate for a review of the success of the Queensland Rural Workers' Accommodation Initiative and for State to adjust the wording of Schedule 6 of the Planning Regulation to refine triggers for applications. Currently the Schedule 6 exemptions only apply to rural properties of at least 25 hectares in size, where no part of the site is subject to flood, bushfire, or landslide hazard overlays under a State or local planning instrument. These criteria, particularly the requirement to not be identified as a hazard area, excludes a significant portion of rural properties.

### 3.1.3 Tourist accommodation

Tourism is integral to the Whitsunday regional economy, estimated to be the largest contributor to the region's annual product. The number of visitor nights in the region has recently reached record highs, the majority of which were accommodated in Airlie - Whitsundays SA2<sup>16</sup>. Figure 6 indicates a 95% growth in the annual domestic visitor nights since 2017. International tourism data collection ceased during the pandemic, with early 2023 data estimates showing that international visitor nights are returning to pre pandemic levels.

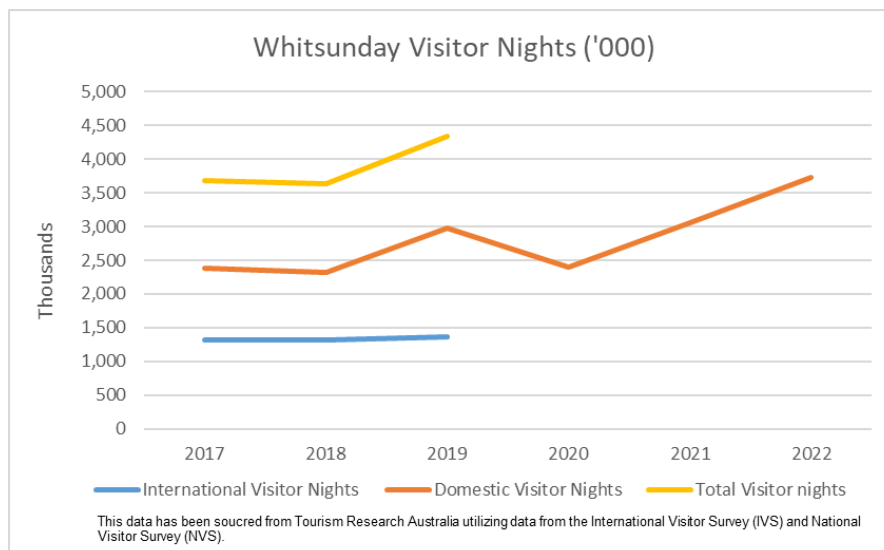


Figure 6 – Whitsunday Total Visitor Nights<sup>17</sup>

The 'holiday home' industry has been in the Whitsundays since the inception of the regions tourism industry. It has grown as an outcome of greater consumer market demand and the increased ease to participate for both accommodation suppliers and visitors as an outcome of low cost online booking platforms such as AirBnB.

It encompasses privately-owned apartments and houses available to visitors. In 2017, Tourism Research Australia identified 45% of visitor nights in the Whitsunday region are attributed to the multiple forms of visitor accommodation that fall under the 'holiday home' definition.

Figure 7 below indicates that occupancy rates are very high, particularly on weekends during Winter.

<sup>16</sup> The Airlie – Whitsundays SA2 includes the Islands and suburbs of: Shute Harbour, Mandalay, Jubilee Pocket, Airlie Beach, Woodwark, Cannonvale, Cannon Valley, parts of Brandy Creek and Mount Marlow.

<sup>17</sup> Tourism Research Australia - Visitor Statistics Whitsundays



Figure 7 – Whitsunday Airbnb Occupancy Rate<sup>18</sup>

Other tourism accommodation types are also operating at high occupancy during weekends and peak periods. The CEO of Tourism Whitsundays advised Council in 2023 *“that the tourism industry is at capacity and cannot grow relative to visitor numbers without additional accommodation.”*

### Response Opportunities

There is a need for Council to work with tourism operators to support the development of tourism accommodation relative to market demand to bolster future economic growth opportunities and increase tourism worker housing.

Tourist accommodation demand is impacting the availability of longer-term rental stock for tourism workers and residents. To minimise encroachment into areas for predominantly residential use, Council will continue to investigate the possibility of removing planning scheme support for short term accommodation dwellings within some residential areas of the region.

## 3.1.4 Critical Workers

### Local Government employee housing

The Whitsunday Regional Council is a large organisation with approximately 450 employees. It is challenging to attract local government staff to the region as many potential staff are coming with their families and look for certain services such as childcare, schools, medical services and other amenities. The limited availability of housing stock is also a potential reason the region is not able to attract experienced local government workers and fill vacant positions.

Council has some housing arrangements in place for staff, however, recognises that there is an opportunity to expand its housing portfolio with many staff having trouble in finding and retaining suitable accommodation.

### Existing Initiatives

- Council owns three properties in Collinsville which are leased to employees.
- Council leases several properties in the Airlie Beach and Cannonvale areas that serve as short term temporary accommodation for Managers and Professionals.
- Council leases additional rental properties with the rent salary sacrificed by the accommodated employee. These properties are provided for Managers and professionals in roles which are difficult to recruit.

<sup>18</sup> AirDNA

## Response Opportunities

Council has opportunities to expand its residential property portfolio for the purpose of supporting staff housing.

For example, Council owns a residential property located in Collinsville. The property is 21.9 hectares in size, relatively flat and zoned low density residential. The property is subject to a development approval for a 400-bed temporary construction camp intended to be used to house workers for the Carmichael coal mine and rail project however this has never been taken up and the land is currently leased for grazing. With supportive funding Council could develop supportive worker housing.

### State Government employee housing

The State Government supplies housing for its employees under two (2) arrangements. The Government Employee Housing arrangement (GEH) provides a range of housing types for staff in dwellings owned by the government. In addition, some departments provide “operational housing” for their employees which is located on or adjacent to operational sites e.g., police stations, hospitals, and schools. Departments may also utilise (rent) houses from local government or the private market (where available) to accommodate essential workers.

Whitsunday	Total	43
	Bowen	25
	Cannonvale	2
	Collinsville	15
	Proserpine	1

Table 5 – State Government Housing Provided in Whitsunday LGA

Anecdotally there is a clear shortage of housing for skilled or key workers with key professions such as general practitioners not being able to find housing for existing staff and is impacting identified business needs to grow services. There is a substantial need for more homes for State Government employees to address the issue now and to keep pace with the growth that will be required to match the estimated population growth.

## Response Opportunities

State government to calculate demand for existing and additional key worker housing and investigate opportunities for providing this within the region on an ongoing basis.

### Other key workers

Council recognises that tourist operators, the service industry and childcare operators are also challenged by housing constraints. Attracting and retaining these workers is critical to the success of the Whitsunday region's economy and these workers must also be considered when formulating our responses.

## 3.1.5 First Nations housing

The Census data indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in Whitsunday are less likely than non-indigenous residents to own their own home, either with a mortgage or by full ownership. They were far more likely to be in rented dwellings, in particular in the private rental market or in government or community provided rental housing.

The median weekly income is lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (\$665 per week), compared to the non-indigenous population (\$803 per week). The difficult rental market would thus

impact even more heavily on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population than the non-indigenous population.

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Non-Indigenous
Owned outright	17.9%	33.8%
Owned with a mortgage	25.0%	31.5%
Rented		
Real estate agent	30.2%	18.7%
State or territory housing authority	8.8%	2.3%
Person not in same household	8.9%	7.4%
Community housing provider	4.8%	1.1%
Other landlord type	2.0%	3.0%
Landlord type not stated	0.4%	0.2%
<i>Total Rented</i>	54.9%	32.9%
Other tenure type	2.0%	1.9%

Table 6- Tenure, ATSI and non-indigenous, Whitsunday LGA, 2021<sup>19</sup>

Girudala Community Cooperative Society Ltd provides services and programs in the areas of Health Promotion, Commonwealth Home Support, Housing and Indigenous Family Wellbeing. The organisation provides long term affordable housing options in the Bowen and Proserpine through the ownership of approximately 50 properties.

### Existing Initiatives

In March 2023, Council approved a development application for material change of use for a 400 dwelling relocatable home park in Bowen. The proposed development aims to capture a specific market focussing on the over 50's demographic including indigenous residents.

Council currently offers donations on Rates and Charges for Not-for-Profit Community Groups and Affordable Housing Organisations in accordance with the [Donations Policy](#).

Council has adopted the [Community Engagement Strategy](#) 2024-2028 which seeks to improve engagement with key interest groups including first nations people, other marginalised groups and future residents.

### Response Opportunities

- Council to support Girudala (and other Not-for-profit housing organisations) under the Donations on Rates & Charges for Not-for-Profit Organisations Policy.

## 3.1.6 Social housing

There is a high demand for social housing across Queensland and allocations are focussed on supporting households with the highest need.

As of 29 Feb 24, there was 500 Social Rental Housing Dwellings in Whitsunday LGA – 393 of those are owned by the Department. The remainder (107) are either head leased or owned by Community

<sup>19</sup> ABS Census 2021



Housing Providers (Whitsunday Housing Company, Girudala Community Cooperative (ICHO), and Proserpine Senior Living Corporation).

Consultation with providers has found that enquiries for housing have increased fivefold in recent years.

In the past Council has provided donations on rates in accordance with the Policy for Donations on Rates & Charges for Not-for-Profit Organisations. Funds raised from the 2023 Mayor's Charity Ball were also contributed to the Whitsunday Housing Company.

Consultation with local businesses has found that the greatest demand for social housing comes from single women aged over 55. The strongest demand is for cheap one- and two-bedroom apartments or granny flats.

. Applications for social housing in the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday region has tripled, from 372 applications in 2017 to 1,003 applications in 2022 within the SA4 area<sup>20</sup>. As of 30 June 2020, 54.9% of applicants for long term social housing were assessed as having 'very high need' for social housing with a further 16.8% of applicants assessed as 'high need'.

As there is a strong need for more social housing across the region, Council recognises the importance of optimising the use of existing stock and will advocate to State to continue work in this space.

### Existing Initiatives

- In September 2023 Council approved a development application for material change of use for 32 multiple dwelling units at in Bowen. The application was lodged by community housing provider Blue CHP.
- In November 2023, Council resolved to indicate its in-principle agreement to donate to the Whitsunday Housing Company a property in Proserpine for the purpose of developing accommodation for homeless women over 55. The housing is proposed to be in the form of [tiny homes](#) and is expected to commence construction in late 2024 and operation in early 2025.
- In July 2023, Council resolved to provide in-principle support to negotiate the donation of land (subject to conditions) to the Bowen Community Centre for the purpose of building housing for front line workers and professionals.
- In late 2022, Council provided assistance to two community housing providers including property and planning information, and assistance with enquiries from other areas of Council such as rates.

### Response Opportunities

- Council advocate to the State to investigate more development opportunities to deliver more social housing of different typologies.
- Council to continue aiding Community Housing Providers through Grant application support and support development proposals in key locations.

## 3.1.7 Homelessness

The ABS report on "Estimating homelessness: Census 2021" reports there are approximately 200 homeless people in the Whitsunday LGA (down from 230 in 2016) and a further 134 people living in 'other marginal housing' circumstances such as improvised overcrowded dwellings (this figure is up from 115 in 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook 2023

	Homeless		Other Marginal Housing	
	2016	2021	2016	2021
<b>Whitsunday Region (LGA)</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>134</b>
Airlie – Whitsundays (SA2)	52	93		
Bowen (SA2)	98	73		
Collinsville (SA2)	20	4		
Proserpine (SA2)	62	31		

Table 7 – Homeless Population Whitsunday LGA 2021<sup>21</sup>

The above table shows that in 2021 most homeless were in Airlie-Whitsundays or Bowen. The number of homeless in Proserpine halved from 2016 to 2021, whereas the numbers increased within the Airlie-Whitsundays by nearly 80 percent. Bowen and Collinsville SA2 saw declines in the numbers of homeless people from 2016 to 2021. The impact of COVID on homelessness has not yet been quantified within the region.

The reasons for people's homelessness are not revealed by this data.. The Census data shows a variety of living situations, with 'staying with other households' the most common way homeless people get a roof over their heads.

	2016	2021
People living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out	10.6%	4.0%
People in supported accommodation for the homeless	15.1%	6.4%
People staying temporarily with other households	41.2%	40.6%
People living in boarding houses	5.5%	14.5%
People in other temporary lodgings	7.0%	6.8%
People living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	20.6%	27.7%

Table 8 – Living situation: homeless people, Whitsunday LGA 2021<sup>22</sup>

The decrease in people living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out and the increase in people in other temporary lodgings (between 2016-2021) may be partly associated with measures put in place by local and state governments in response to COVID-19. The increases in people living in boarding houses and people in other temporary lodging are also partly associated with improvements in data quality through greater use of administrative data.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that as homelessness is not a characteristic that is directly measured in the Census, the data produced by the ABS are estimates, derived using analytical techniques based on the characteristics observed in the Census and statistical assumptions.

Although these figures are relatively low in comparison to the overall population, there is still a homeless population in the region. Any expansion in specialized housing, transitional housing, or highly affordable housing is likely to have a positive impact on this issue.

## Existing Initiatives

The Whitsunday and Bowen Neighbourhood Centres provide support and programs for people who are experiencing disadvantage or are vulnerable due to poverty, low income, experiencing homelessness, mental health conditions, domestic violence and/ or crisis; and people based in rural and remote areas. These programs are supported by both staff and volunteers.

Council recognises there is a difference between homelessness and illegal camping and aims to connect people sleeping rough with support services such as the neighbourhood centres.

<sup>21</sup> Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021, 2023

<sup>22</sup> Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021, 2023

<sup>23</sup> Estimating Homelessness: Census 2021, 2023

## Response opportunities

- Council continues to connect homeless people to community services and develop improved data collection methods, including location data to support disaster management plans.

## 3.2 Housing Diversity and Density

Separate detached dwellings are evidently the most prominent housing structure in the Region. A Housing Affordability Study conducted by Council in 2022 identified a need to encourage housing diversity in residential areas and higher density in well-serviced existing neighbourhoods.

The Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook data authored by Urbis found that a large portion of homes are not adequately suited to household size, given the limited diversity in housing products. Across the Whitsundays 79% of homes have at least one bedroom spare and 47% have at least two bedrooms spare. This indicates that occupancy levels are low. This could be contributed to the common desire to have more space (which is proven to have been enhanced since the Covid Pandemic) and that people don't have the choice of 'right sizing' simply because there is not enough alternate housing availability such as town homes or smaller dwelling types suitable for them.

The lack of density and diversity is also evident when looking at land allotment sizes in the Region. Despite the minimum lot size for the low-density residential zone being 600m<sup>2</sup>, the median lot size for the zone more than double this at 1239m<sup>2</sup>. This is likely related to very steep and flood prone land, particularly in Airlie Beach and Cannon Valley.

Housing Supply and Diversity is a State Interest identified in the State Planning Policy, which highlights that a range of housing options provides communities with choice and the ability to adapt as community structures evolve, and family and household type change. Local planning instruments can support the delivery of affordable housing and housing choice to meet the diverse needs of communities.

## Existing Initiatives

Council undertook a Housing Affordability Study in 2022. Community feedback was sought in relation to various options that would facilitate affordable housing in the Region.

Recommendations of the study were considered at the November Council meeting in 2022, where Council resolved to develop two Planning Scheme amendment packages focusing upon:

1. Minimum lot sizes for dual occupancy and increased floor area for secondary dwellings;
2. Introduction of a Medium density residential zone and incentivise mixed use accommodation and commercial development.

Council has developed a Land Supply Analysis and Housing Needs Assessment in accordance with the State guidance for local governments - [Integrating state interests in planning schemes](#). These studies will provide supporting evidence and guidance for future Council housing supply strategies.

## Response Opportunities

- Council to develop a Housing Strategy in accordance with the State Planning Policy. The Housing Strategy will set a clear plan for future planning scheme amendments and other initiatives for housing to appropriately plan for residential growth and deliver housing choice, diversity and affordability that meets the current and future needs of the community.
- Council continues to develop the Planning Scheme Amendments focusing on:
  - **Secondary Dwelling** - Increase the maximum floor area for secondary dwellings to encourage development for homeowners. Example: 70m<sup>2</sup> maximum to 100m<sup>2</sup> maximum gross floor area.
  - **Lot Size Requirements for Dual Occupancy** – Reduce minimum lot size requirements for Dual Occupancy. Currently a Dual Occupancy requires 800m<sup>2</sup> minimum lot size in all zones. Example: relax requirements, particularly minimum lot size from 800m<sup>2</sup> to 600m<sup>2</sup> or smaller.

- **Mixed Use Accommodation** - Introduce benchmarks to Zone Codes to strongly encourage accommodation over commercial developments, including a full review of the Mixed-Use Zone Code.
- **Medium Density Residential Zone** - Introduce a Medium Density Residential Zone to facilitate increased density, and diversity of accommodation types.
- Council to further investigate planning scheme amendment options such as:
  - **Lot Sizes** - Reduce the minimum lot sizes within urban residential zones and introduce a maximum lot size to enable an increase in density and diversity.
  - **Assessment Levels** - Reduce assessment level in certain zones for desirable housing types. Example: Reduce assessment level for Dual Occupancy from Impact Assessable in Low Density Residential Zone.
  - **Lot Diversity Benchmarks** - Introduce lot diversity benchmarks in the Reconfiguration of a Lot Code requiring some lots be higher density (multiple dwellings, dual occupancies, and small lots).

### 3.3 Trunk Infrastructure for Housing Supply

Infrastructure delivery is key to unlocking land and housing supply however the costs involved with constructing and delivering infrastructure can, at times, be prohibitive to development. Consultation with industry stakeholders as part of the Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook 2023 confirmed this.

The Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook identified Infrastructure and Conversion and Delivery as two of the key overarching themes to core housing challenges in the region.

2	<b>Infrastructure:</b> Inadequate infrastructure to support cost effective and timely housing development. Barriers to on the ground infrastructure delivery include the cost of infrastructure provision for government and developers and lack of agility to plan and deliver required infrastructure ahead of development need, leading to difficulty matching housing supply to meet housing demand.
3	<b>Conversion and Delivery:</b> Increasing complexity and risk across the industries and sectors that contribute to housing delivery (e.g. planning, infrastructure, financing, construction, real estate etc.) are all contributing to an increasing lack of conversion. This lack of conversion is demonstrated via reduction in development applications and approvals for housing, an increase in 'banking' of land subject to housing approvals and a reduction in approvals for housing proceeding to construction.

Figure 8 – Summary of Housing Challenges<sup>24</sup>

The Queensland Government Statistician's Office's data on stock of uncompleted lot approvals indicates that Whitsunday has 1,002 uncompleted lot approvals. It is a reasonable assumption that infrastructure constraints and required upgrades has a part to play in the lack of take up and conversion of some of these approvals.

Increasing housing diversity and density where connection to existing Trunk Infrastructure is more easily attainable will lead to a more efficient and affordable infrastructure networks.

#### Response Opportunities

- Council to prioritize and improve Infrastructure network planning to support effective trunk infrastructure delivery in key demand locations.
- Council to seek State funding support to deliver catalytic trunk infrastructure to unlock the appropriate sequencing of future development and develop well connected communities.

<sup>24</sup> Greater Whitsunday Housing Playbook 2023



## 4. Summary & Response Opportunities

A Local Housing Action Plan requires coordination 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 will be determined in consultation with the local housing and social services sector. These responses can provide flexibility in delivery and support each of the broad areas identified.



Figure 9 – Response Opportunities

### 4.1 Actions

The Council with the support of the Queensland Government through the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025 is committed to the delivery of this 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.

○	Land and Development	Timeline
1.1	Prepare an Economic and Population Study, Land Supply Analysis and Housing Needs Assessment.	2024
1.2	<p>Review existing land holdings, to identify lots that would be suitable for development and or redevelopment to support short- and longer-term housing outcomes. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council owns land in Collinsville and with supported funding could build additional worker housing.</li> <li>Support Whitsunday Housing Company Tiny Home initiative.</li> <li>Council to support (with knowledge of developable land) Blue CHP and Regional Housing Provider applications to the Housing Australia Future Fund Facility (HAFFF). If these applications are unsuccessful seek support from State funding (HIF) to achieve the desired social housing development outcomes.</li> </ul>	2024- 2025
1.3	Apply to the State Government to obtain grant funding for key trunk infrastructure to unlock supply opportunities and support sustainable sequencing of supply	2024 - 2026
1.4	Support development outcomes which facilitate housing diversity co located near jobs, transport and community facilities and services.	Ongoing

○	Planning	
2.1	Close housing policy gaps – Council to seek funding support to assist in preparing a Housing Strategy in accordance with the State Planning Policy.	2024/2025
2.2	Prioritise and improve infrastructure network planning to support critical infrastructure delivery across the region.	2024-2025
2.3	Develop Planning Scheme amendments that support housing diversity and density outcomes.	2024-2026
2.4	Advocate for State Government commitment and timeline to update 2012 MIW Regional Plan coordinated with the preparation of the MIW Regional Infrastructure Plan.	2024
2.5	Support small lot housing in areas close to amenities and transport (identify preferred locations, approach Tier 1 CHP, support grant applications to State and Federal Governments).	2024-2026
2.6	Work with the LGAQ to advocate for a State review of the Rural Workers Initiative and Schedule 6 Exemptions within the Planning Regulation.	2024

○	Optimisation	
3.1	<p>Improve data capturing processes to better inform decision making. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tracking the size, number, and location of secondary dwellings.</li> <li>Consider council lead counts of homeless people and their location on an annual/biannual basis.</li> </ul>	2024
3.2	Investigate options for facilitating the repurposing/retrofitting of existing vacant buildings in appropriate areas.	2024-2025
3.3	Advocate to the State Government to continue reviewing existing State-owned housing stock in WRC to ensure minimum housing standards are being met and 100% utilisation is being achieved. For example, a three-bedroom home is not being occupied by a single occupant.	2024-2025

○	Master planning	
4.1	<p>Prepare a Growth Corridor Strategy (Proserpine- Shute Harbour) and Master Plan initiatives that identify the location of key residential and supportive land uses and infrastructure including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Airlie Beach Precinct Master Plan – supporting tourist accommodation;</li> <li>Cannonvale Community Centres District – supporting residential growth, community facilities and services.</li> </ul>	2024-2025

○	Supports	
5.1	Whitsunday Regional Council to review and assess the Greater Whitsunday Housing Alliance Terms of Reference and Charter to evaluate potential benefits and financial implications for the Whitsunday region before signing on as a member of the Alliance.	2024 - ongoing
5.2	Undertake awareness campaigns to let residents know what they can do to support more supply through secondary dwellings and rooming accommodation.	2024- ongoing
5.3	Prepare a Community Engagement Strategy to target actions that improve engagement with first nations people, future residents, and marginalised groups. Increase community education to build understanding of urban change.	2023-2024
5.4	Support Community Housing Providers for development of new social and affordable housing. Council to assist in identifying preferred locations and building business case and applications to the State and Federal Government.	2024-2026
5.5	<p>Council continues to connect homeless people to community services and develop improved data collection methods including capturing location data to help understand changes occurring outside census collection time.</p> <p>Location data to be shared with disaster management for planning and mitigation strategies prior and during events.</p>	ongoing
5.6	Advocate to the State and Federal Government for affordable housing initiatives to be implemented in the Whitsunday Region.	2024 - 2026
5.7	Advocate to the State Government to provide further Critical and key worker accommodation (teachers, police, hospital staff).	2024-2026
5.8	Rates Policy - The Community Services Directorate monitor the efficacy of the Donations on Rates & Charges for Not-for-Profit Organisations Policy and review accordingly.	Ongoing

○	People in need	
6.1	Investigate the expansion of accommodation for staff in key locations.	2024-2026
6.2	Assist/ facilitate existing and proposed retirement/ aged care facilities to expand.	2024-2026
6.3	Advocate to State and Federal Government for further investment in retirement and aged care facilities for the region	2024-2046

○	Construction	
7.1	Advocate to the State Government to incentivise and help regional builders.	2024-2046

7.2	Investigate incentives to encourage housing development. For example, incentives would focus on housing stock being constructed in a one-two year period or focus on specific development types such as Aged Care.	2024-2025
○	<b>Capital solutions</b>	
8.1	Investigate potential infrastructure projects eligible for funding under Government programs and grants.	2024 - 2025

## 4.2 Next Steps

A working group of key representatives from Whitsunday Regional Council and select State Government agencies will progress actions, review findings, develop an agreed reporting frequency to update Council, key housing provider stakeholders and the community.