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Ballina Shire Rural Settlement Character Statements

Part 1

Prepared for Ballina Shire Council
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Executive Summary

Ballina Shire Council commissioned Mike Svikis Planning and Tara McGready to prepare rural settlement character statements for nine locations in Ballina Shire. These covered Newrybar, Tintenbar, Fernleigh, Meerschaum Vale, Rous, Rous Mill, South Ballina, Empire Vale/Keith Hall, and Patches Beach. A *Place Check* approach was used to assess the localities and discuss them with residents at a series of public meetings.

The project arose from the idea in 2009 that the Shire-wide Development Control Plan should have character statements that provided a basis for any area-specific planning controls. The project has also been identified for action in the Ballina Shire Growth Management Strategy and Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

The meeting information was compiled, reviewed and summarised, and combined with locality maps. It has been split up in this report into a number of deliverables that document community views on a wide range of issues:

- Rural Settlement Character Statements
- Community *Place Checks*
- Consultant *Place Checks*
- Issues, Objectives and Strategies Arising from Meetings

The final document has been divided into two parts. Part 1 contains the rural settlement character statements and maps. Part 2 contains the supporting information collected during the project upon which the rural character statements were based.



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Introduction

Mike Svikis Planning and Tara McGready were engaged by Ballina Shire Council to prepare character statements for nine rural settlement areas identified by Ballina Shire Council in its project brief. The localities nominated were Newrybar, Tintenbar, Fernleigh, Patches Beach, Empire Vale/Keith Hall, South Ballina, Meerschaum Vale, Rous and Rous Mill. Community consultation was a key aspect of the project.

The project arose from the idea in 2009 that the Shire-wide Development Control Plan should have character statements that provided a basis for any area-specific planning controls. The character statements were also a strategic action in the Ballina Shire Growth Management Statement. The project was included as a planned action for the 2013/14 Delivery Program and Operational Plan.



Methodology

The approach to preparing the character statements was based on a technique known as a *Place Check*, used both to prepare a site audit as well as to guide the community consultation for each locality. Council circulated the *Place Check* by mail to locality residents so they could participate, even if they could not attend the meetings.

In summary, the *Place Check* involved Mike and Tara inspecting each locality for answers to questions such as:

- What makes this place special?
- What characterises the built environment and could it be enhanced?
- Who lives here and where do they work, shop, play or go to school?
- What limits how easy it is to get around?
- How can the place be made better-connected, more accessible and more welcoming?
- How successful are the streets and spaces between land uses? What could be improved?
- How do people enjoy the environment here? What is missing?
- How can the place be made safer and more pleasant?

These questions, in a slightly modified form, were then used as a basis for consulting with the local community to gain their responses to the questions, specific to their locality. Ballina Shire Council wrote to residents inviting them to complete a *Place Check* proforma and/or attend a public meeting to be held in their area in order to participate in a group *Place Check*. Meetings were held at Tintenbar (12 May 2014 where 33 people attended), Newrybar (14 May 2014 where 37 people attended), Meerschaum Vale (22 May 2014 where 60 people attended), and Empire Vale (26 May 2014 where 37 people attended). Thirty-three individually completed *Place Check* submissions were received by Council covering all of the rural localities discussed at the public meetings. The questions asked of the community were:

- What makes your locality special?
- Who lives here? That is, young families, older people, weekend residents, farmers, etc? Where do they work, shop, play or go to school?
- Are the buildings around here of a certain type? Is there a particular feel to how homes and buildings are built? If so, would you encourage that to continue?
- Is it easy to get around? Why?
- How do people enjoy the environment here? Is there anything missing?
- What's great about your locality?

Each public meeting was structured around the *Place Check* and each locality was discussed in turn. The meetings were chaired by Mike and Tara and a Council officer (either Suzanne Acret or Matt Wood). When finalising the locality *Place Checks*, written *Place Check* submissions were taken into account on an equal basis to the verbal input at the meetings. The well attended meetings covered a wide range of issues and these were not always confined to planning or urban design matters.

The consultant *Place Checks*, community *Place Checks* and the community meeting information formed the basis of the rural settlement character statements which were then combined with locality maps. The community made it clear that each rural settlement has a focus, but the edges of each locality are not clearly defined and don't really need to be. The edges of each map in this document are not intended to represent the edge of each settlement.



The information collected as part of this project has been compiled, reviewed, summarised and split up into a number of deliverables that document community views on a wide range of issues:

- Rural Settlement Character Statements
- Community *Place Checks*
- Consultant *Place Checks*
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The final document has been divided into two parts. Part 1 contains the rural settlement character statements and maps. Part 2 contains the supporting information collected during the project upon which the rural settlement character statements were based.



Rural Settlement Character Statements

Newrybar

Newrybar is a compact, safe, small village characterised by its open main street, and a network of rural roads leading into surrounding open farmland and horticultural activities. The small main street urban environment of Newrybar has been gentrified in recent years with authentic, historic buildings taking on a new focus such as restaurants and shops. It retains a strong sense of its history and low key ambience, yet is in proximity to bigger centres such as Bangalow, Byron Bay, Lismore and Ballina where the community can visit for additional services and facilities. Moving the highway will strengthen connections to the outlying parts of Newrybar including the public primary school on Broken Head Road and the elevated, good quality farmland with views to the ocean and the Richmond Ranges. Residents identify with Newrybar as a place with a strong sense of community, and they consider the quiet rural atmosphere and historic old-world charm of the locality to be distinguishing features that they want to keep.

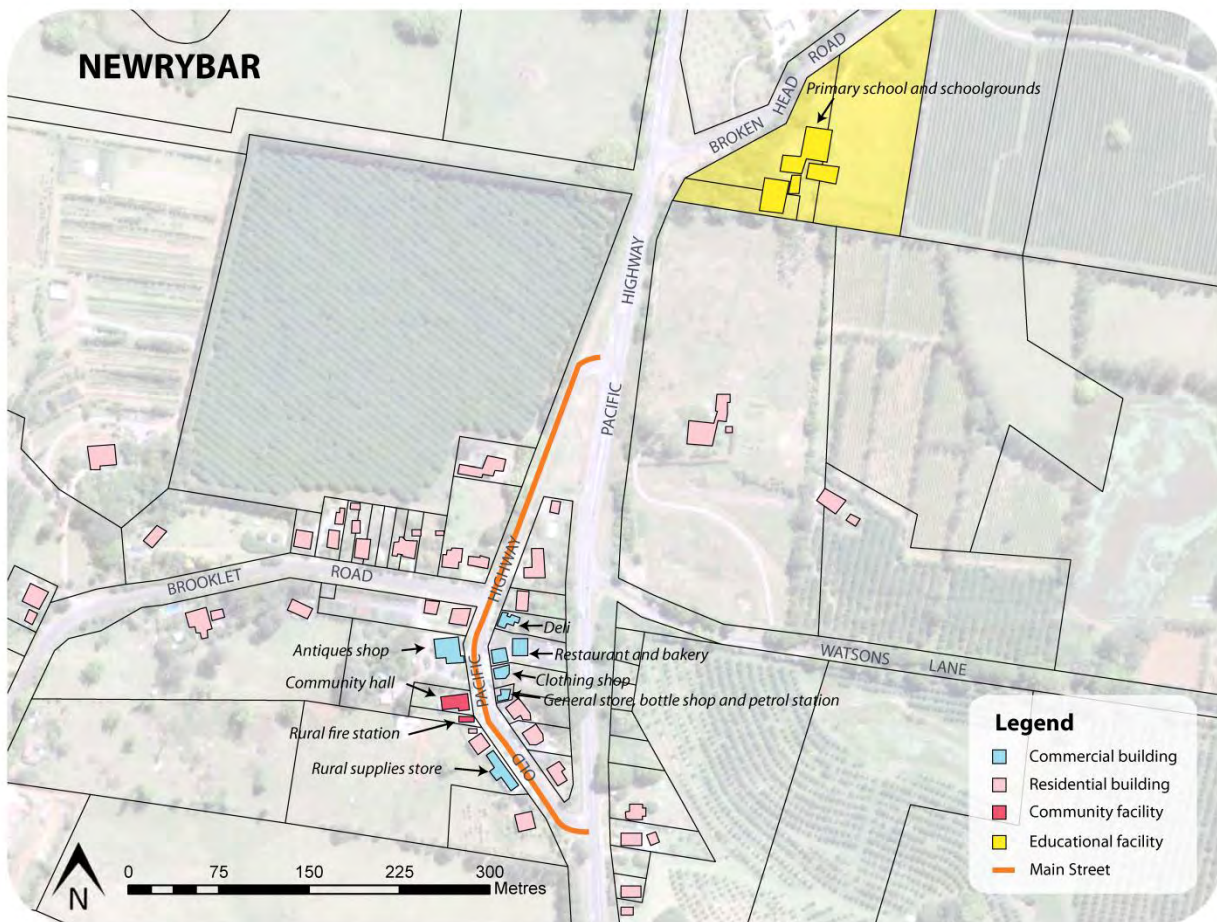


Figure 1: Newrybar

Tintenbar

Tintenbar is a small, historical, rural hamlet characterised by heavily vegetated steep slopes leading down to Emigrant Creek. The wider area is a mix of rural residential and farmland, some places with distant ocean views. The centre of the community is focussed around a precinct at the intersection of Tintenbar Road and George Street where a hall, general store and medical centre are located. This precinct also contains a cluster of homes on residential-sized lots, but the locality extends through to its sports fields and tennis courts along Fernleigh Road and the Tintenbar-Teven Public School at the top of the hill at Fredericks Lane. The hamlet has a strong sense of community with a wide range of ages in its population. It hosts the largest rural school in the Shire and is a safe place to live a rural life that is not too far from the coast. Tintenbar is central to the coastal village of Lennox Head, and the towns of Alstonville and Ballina. The community of Tintenbar values the quiet, rural atmosphere of the hamlet but at the same time wants to ensure that the level of activity within its central precinct is maintained.

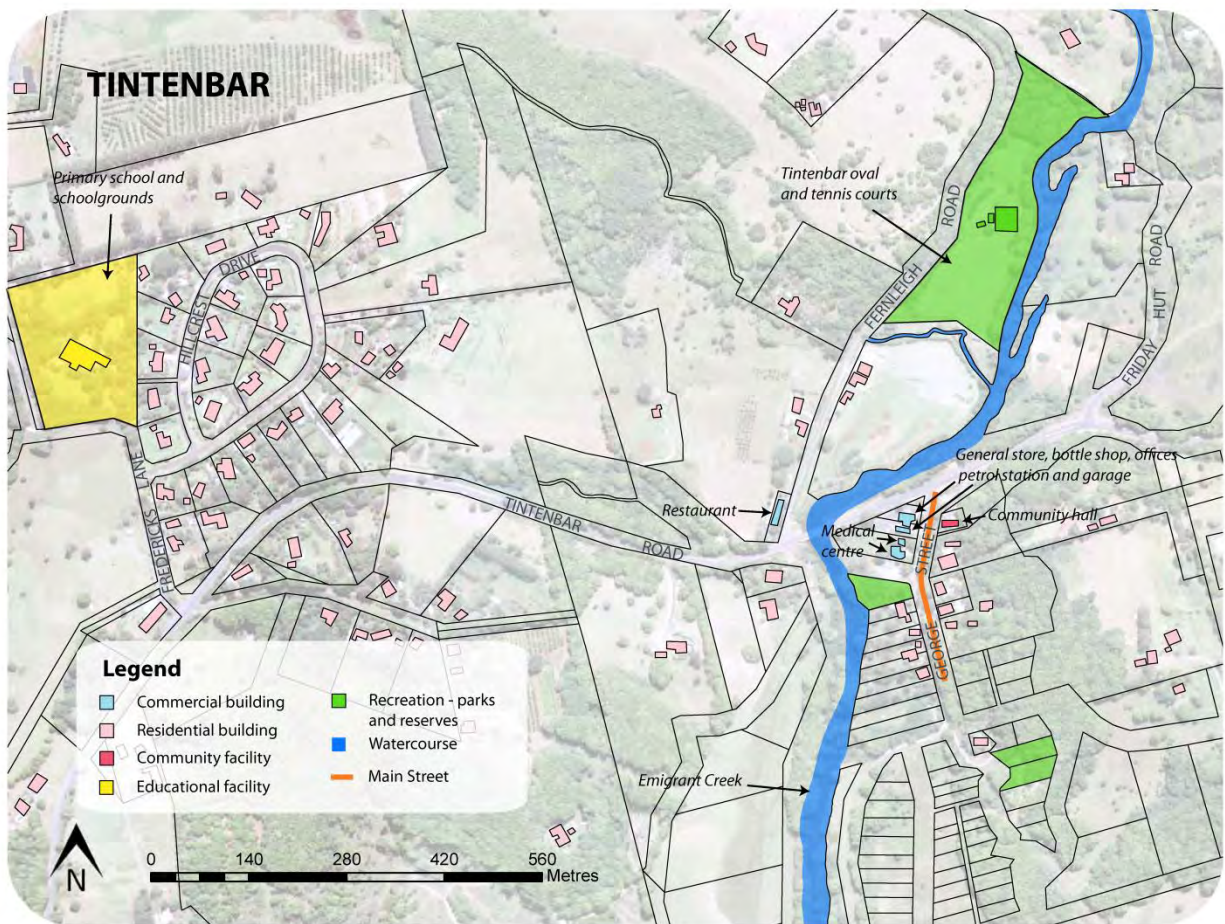


Figure 2: Tintenbar

Fernleigh

Fernleigh is a small, rural locality along the Fernleigh Road, characterised by open rolling hills with a sense of elevation and distant views. The wider area is a mix of concessional lot rural residential and farmland, with a focus on horticulture and cattle. The main community focus is the small Fernleigh Public School, but the locality extends through to Burnett Park at the Nashua Road junction with Fernleigh Road and then up along Kirklands Lane. Fernleigh is halfway between Tintenbar and Newrybar, and relates to both these communities. The community considers the quiet atmosphere and beautiful undulating rural landscape make Fernleigh a special place.

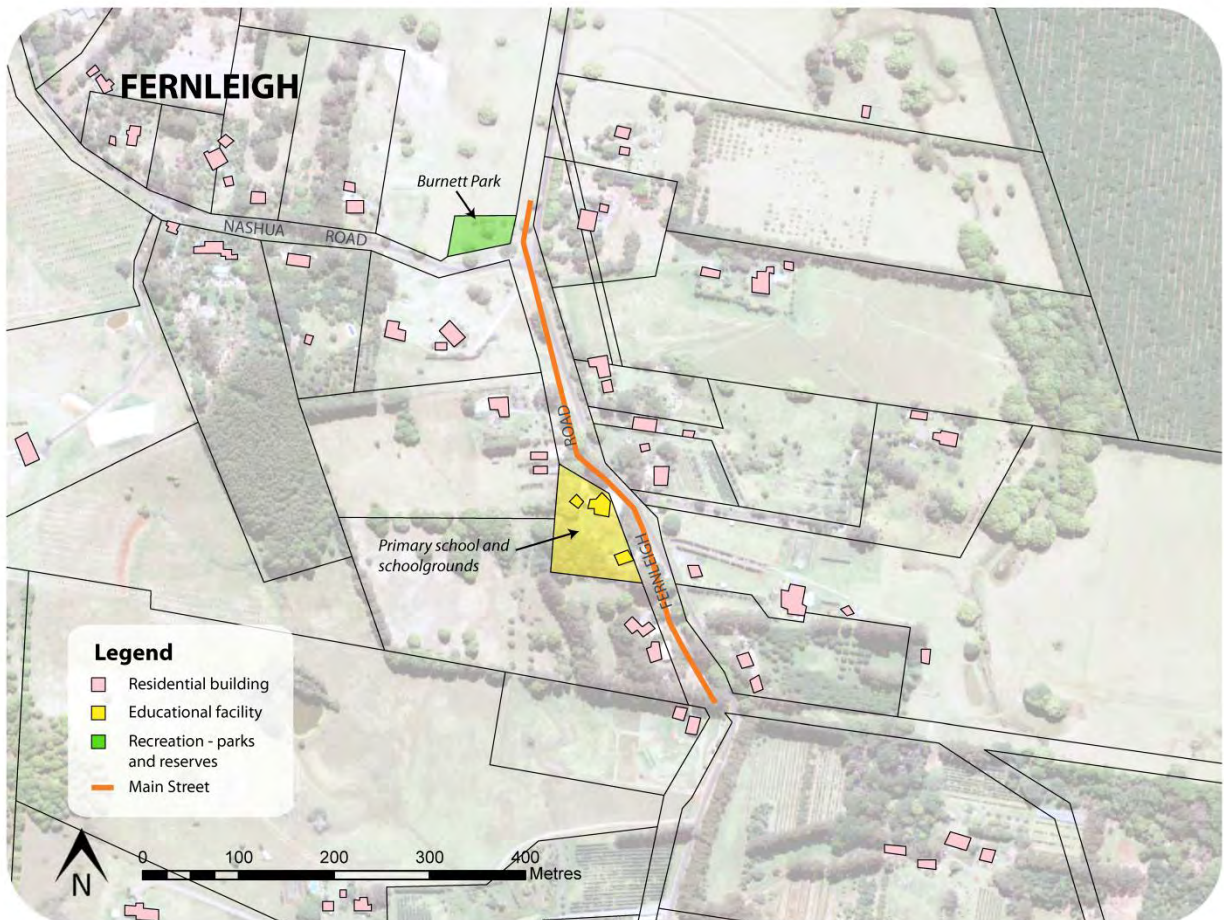


Figure 3: Fernleigh

Meerschaum Vale

Meerschaum Vale is a small, rural locality along the Wardell Road, characterised by open rolling hills and a broad flat valley that marks the edge of the Tuckean Swamp and Richmond River floodplain. The community values the mist in the valley in the mornings and the swimming waterholes in the creek. The locality includes Big Scrub remnants, cattle farms and horticultural areas mixed with lifestyle properties. The main community focus is the Meerschaum Vale hall and the Rural Fire Service Station. Meerschaum Vale is a short drive from the school at Rous as well as Alstonville and Wardell, and relates to both these larger communities for services and facilities. Ballina and Lismore are available for higher level service and work opportunities. It is a close and caring community that embraces residents of all ages and backgrounds. There is a passion for the natural environment and a passion for the locality to remain small and rural.

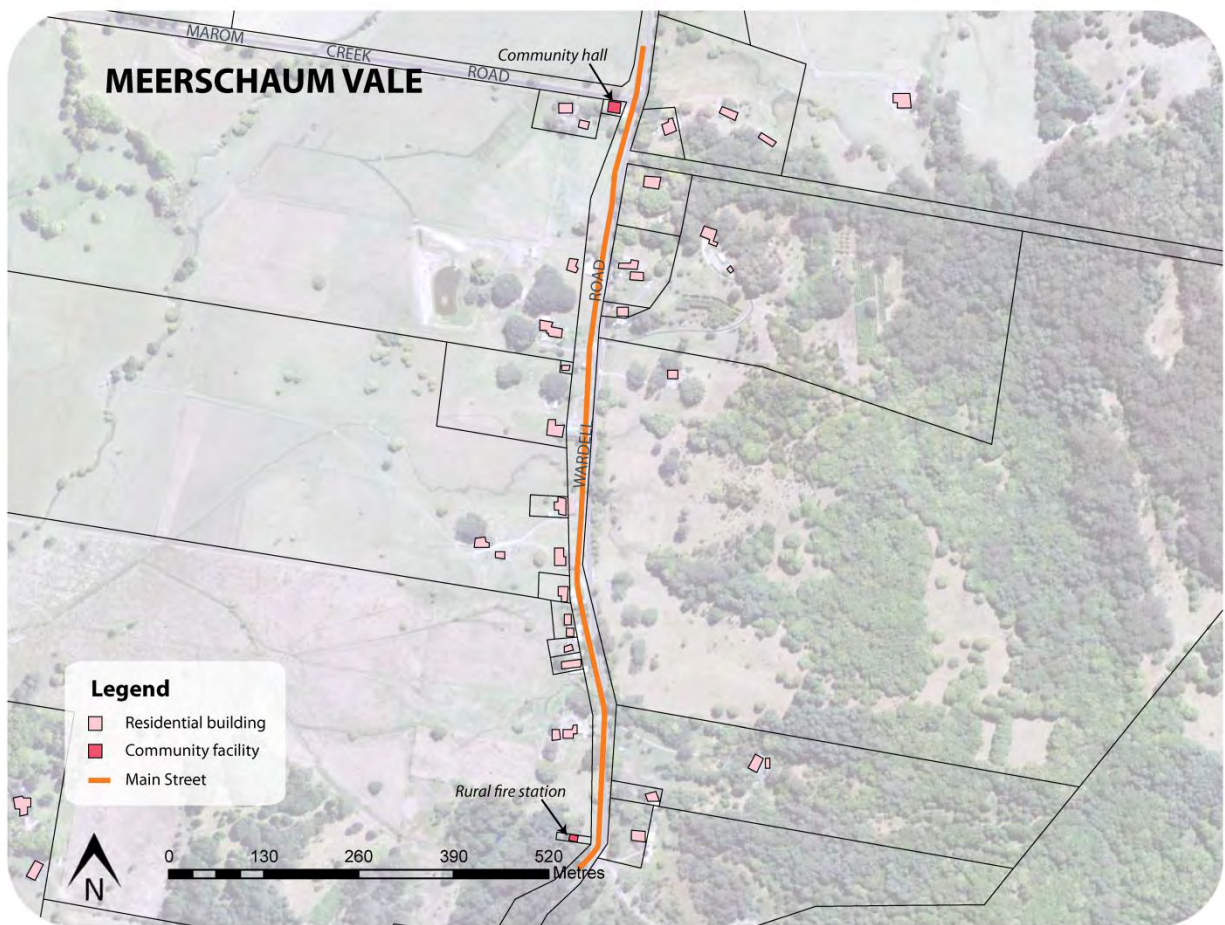


Figure 4: Meerschaum Vale

Rous

Rous is a small, rural locality in the vicinity of Rous Road, characterised by open elevated grazing land, large horticultural areas and pockets of remnant rainforest such as the Davis Scrub Reserve. The main community focus is the Rous Public School at the intersection of Rous Road and Rous Cemetery Road. Rous is a short drive to Alstonville and relates to this larger community for services and facilities. Local employment includes successful wholesale plant nurseries that supply to retailers throughout NSW and interstate. Ballina and Lismore are available for higher level service and “off farm” work opportunities. It is a friendly community that retains an emphasis on commercial agriculture based on fertile red soils and reliable rainfall. The community has close, historic links to Rous Mill and the Rous Mill hall. Residents of Rous value the low density atmosphere, swimming at Marom Falls, roadside stalls that sell fresh fruit and vegetables, and the community gatherings at the school and hall.

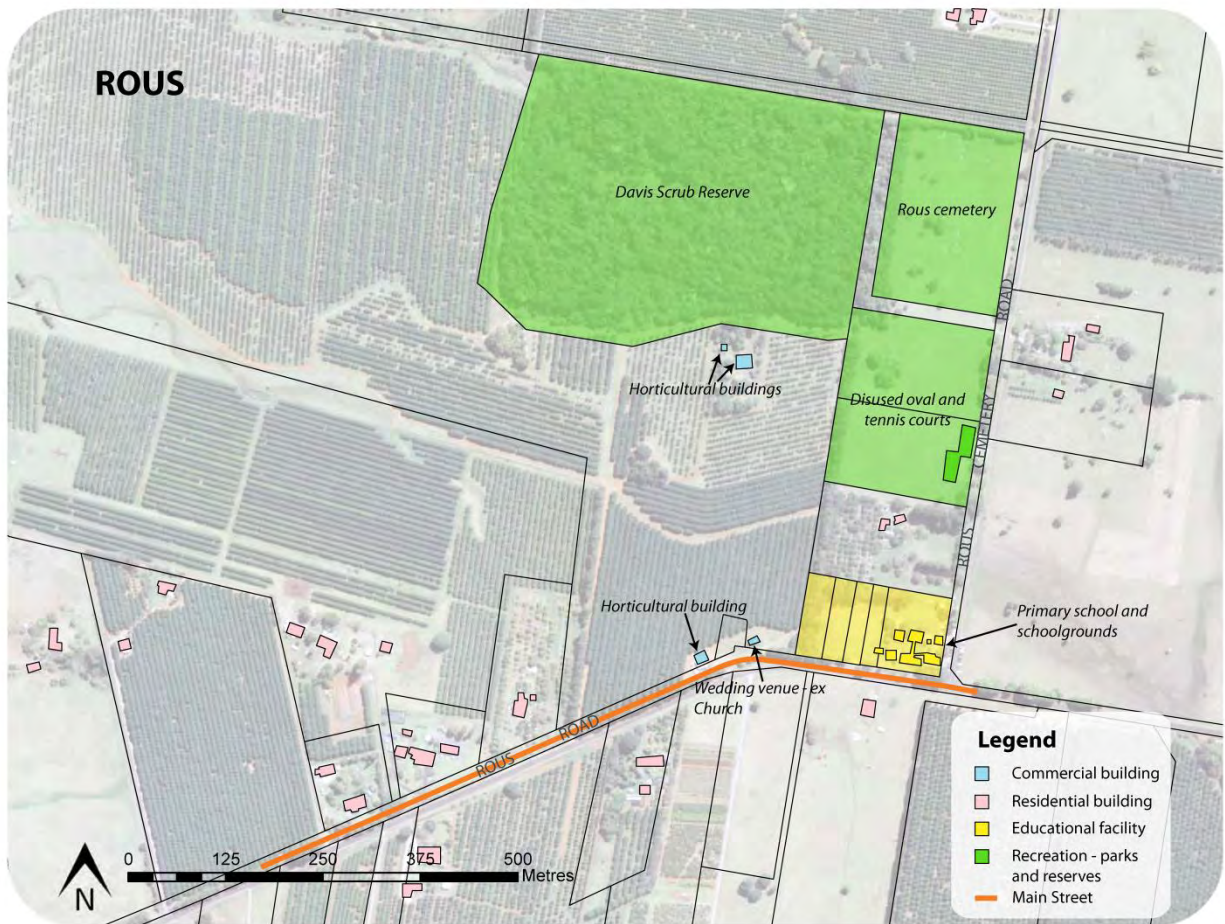


Figure 5: Rous

Rous Mill

Rous Mill is a small, rural locality with a genuine village feel. Located in elevated red soil country on either side of Youngman Creek in the vicinity of Rous Mill Road, it is characterised by open elevated grazing land, large horticultural areas and pockets of remnant rainforest. The main community focus is the Rous Mill hall which is located opposite an operational Uniting Church. This is one of the last rural churches left in Ballina Shire. Rous Mill is a short drive to Alstonville and relates to this larger community for many services and facilities. Ballina and Lismore are available for higher level service and “off farm” work opportunities. It is a friendly, accepting community that is characterised by dwellings on small village size lots that reflect its past history as a much larger sugar milling town complete with light rail line. Rous Mill retains an emphasis on commercial agriculture based on fertile red soils and reliable rainfall. The residents have close historic links to Rous and the Rous Public School, and feel like they are living in a true community.



Figure 6: Rous Mill

South Ballina

South Ballina is a small, rural locality at the tip of the South Ballina peninsula with a long history of agriculture and tourism that continues to this day. Located in flat, alluvial, sandy soils its land uses include sugar cane farming, a sand quarry and areas of native vegetation along the river, mainly in the Richmond River Nature Reserve. The main community focus is the two caravan parks along South Ballina Beach Road. It is a short drive and ferry ride to Ballina, which provides the majority of services and facilities, and “off farm” work opportunities. It is characterised by a small number of dwellings either on significant cane farms or on small clusters of concessional lots cut from cane farms in the past. It also encompasses the residents of its two caravan parks. The community has close historic links to Patches Beach, Keith Hall and Empire Vale. It is a community that places a high value on its ferry service. Residents feel like they are living where the Richmond River meets the sea, and they get the best of both those amazing environments including dolphin and whale watching, fishing, surfing and four wheel driving on the beach.

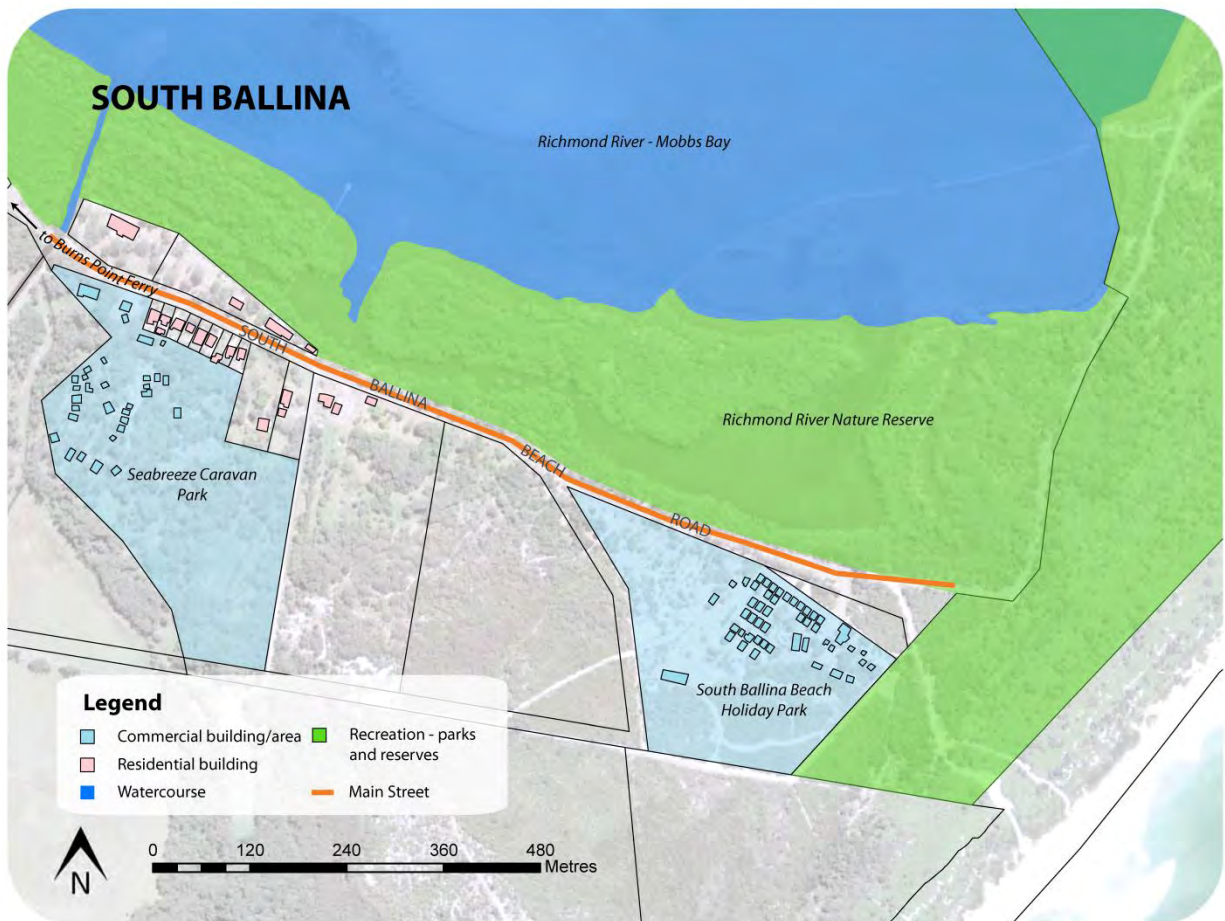


Figure 7: South Ballina

Empire Vale / Keith Hall

Empire Vale/Keith Hall is a small, rural locality on the South Ballina peninsula with a long history of agriculture that continues to this day. Located in alluvial, sandy soils between East Wardell and South Ballina it is characterised by large areas of open flat sugar cane land with areas of native vegetation along the river. There are also some horticultural and large greenhouse-based hydroponic enterprises. The main community focus is the historic Empire Vale primary school and the unique post office on River Drive. It is a short drive and ferry ride to Ballina, which provides the majority of services and facilities, and “off farm” work opportunities. It is characterised by dwellings either on significant cane farms or on small clusters of concessional lots cut from cane farms in the past. The community has close historic links to Patches Beach and South Ballina. The residents value the tranquillity of the location as well as the proximity of the river and beach for recreation.

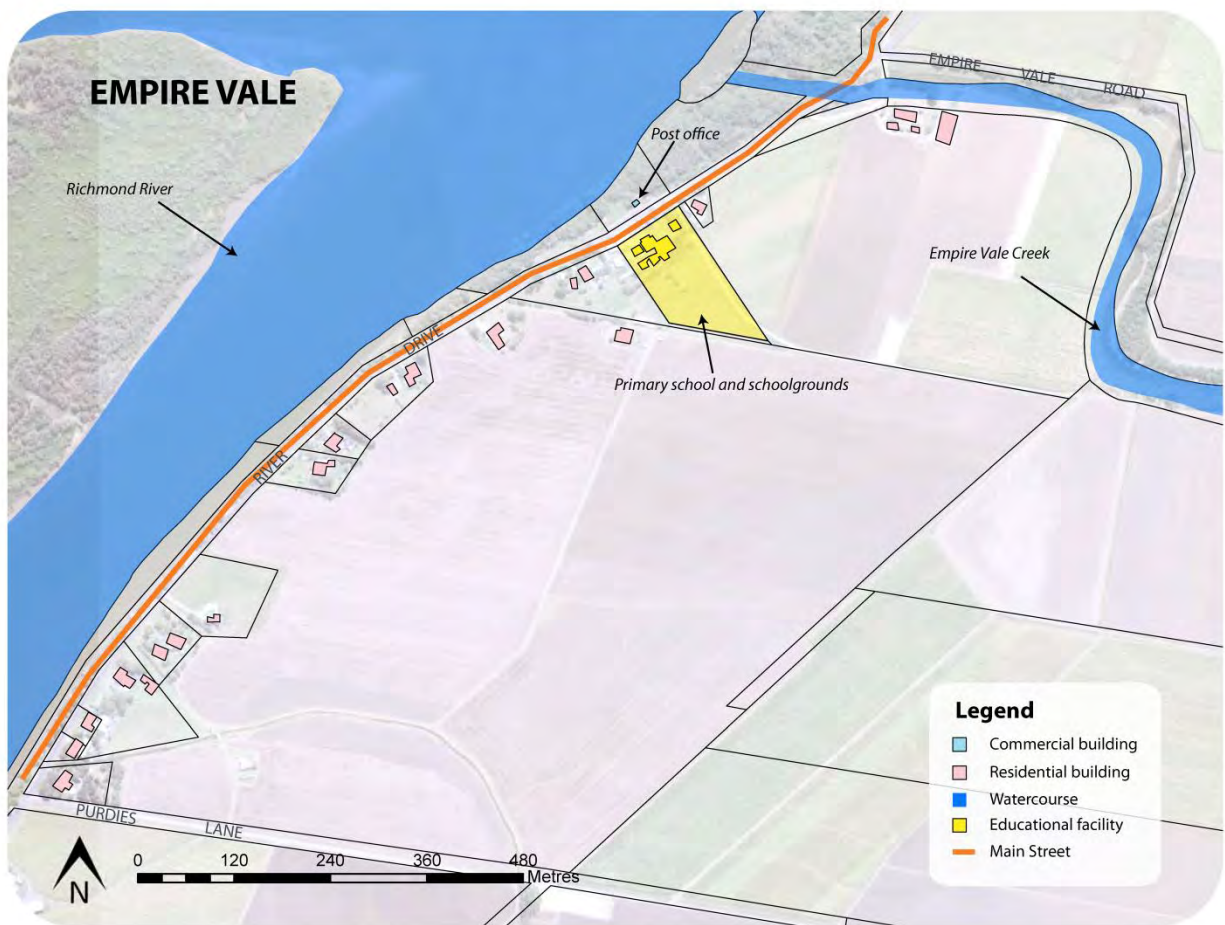


Figure 8: Empire Vale

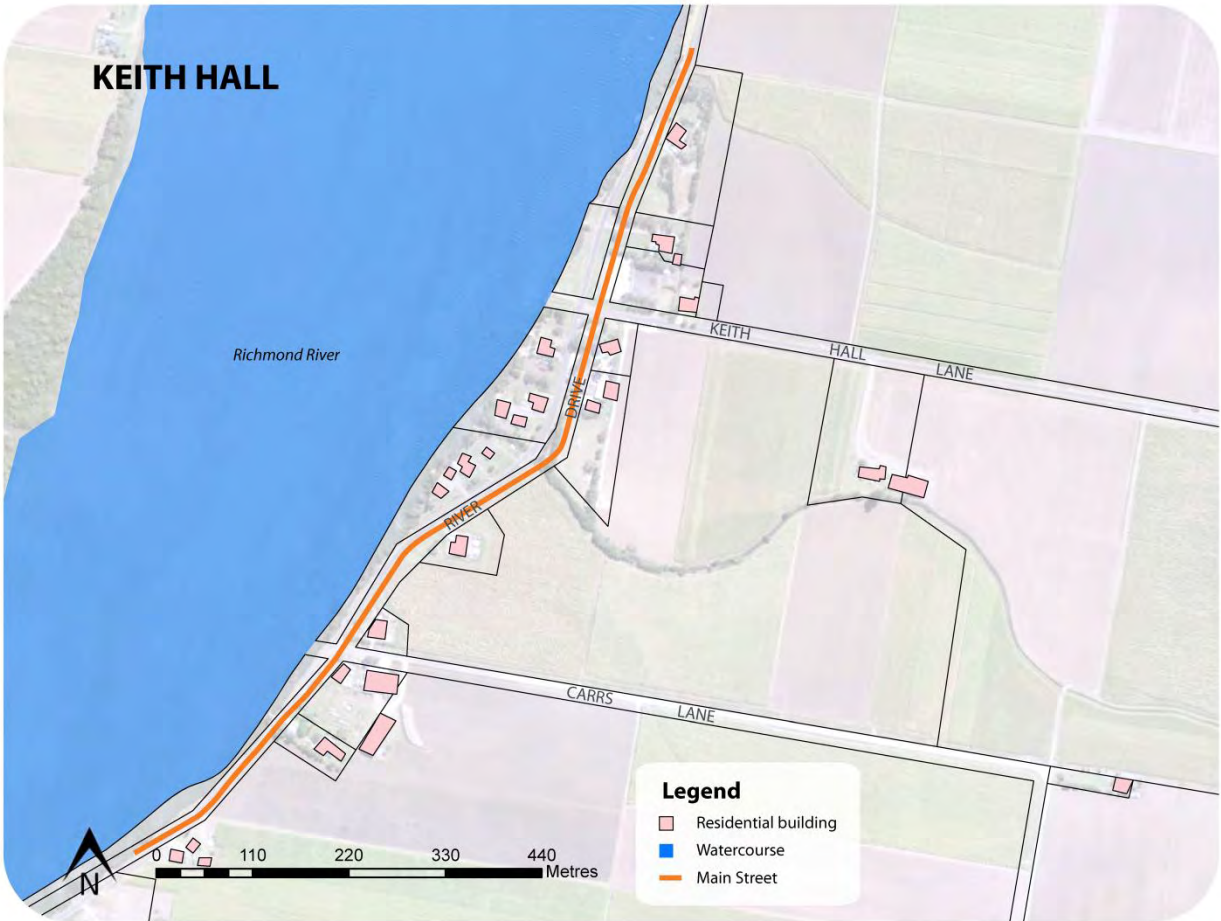


Figure 9: Keith Hall

Patches Beach

Patches Beach is a compact, rural locality on the beach side of the South Ballina peninsula with a history of agriculture and “weekender” accommodation that continues to this day. Located in alluvial, sandy soils it is characterised by open flat sugar cane land with areas of native vegetation along the beach, some of it on Crown land. The main community focus is the cluster of 17 houses at the end of Patches Beach Road, immediately adjacent to a beach access track for pedestrians and four wheel drives. It is a short drive and ferry ride to Ballina, which provides the majority of services and facilities, and is also a short drive back to Wardell and the Pacific Highway. It is a friendly, accepting community that also provides holiday letting accommodation for tourists during peak season. The community has close historic links to South Ballina, Keith Hall, Empire Vale and Wardell. The residents value their beach access (pedestrian and vehicle) and the opportunity this provides for fishing, surfing and four wheel driving as well as horse riding and exercising dogs. The natural environment is important and the locals value the peace and quiet, and the dark night sky with no street lights.

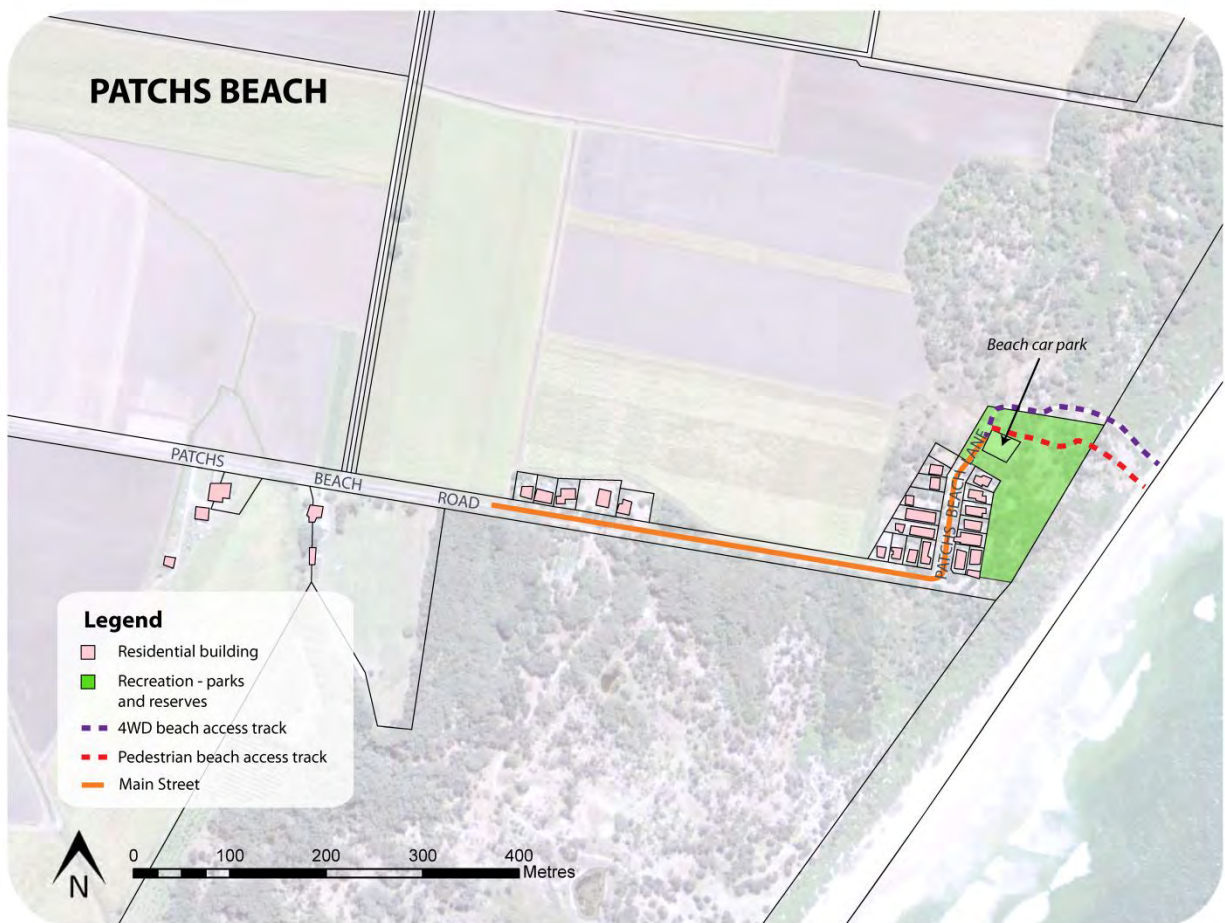


Figure 10: Patches Beach