

From this ...



to this?



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PO Box 1350 Armidale NSW 2350
Email: mail@armidalecreeklands.org.au

Web: www.armidalecreeklands.org.au

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/armidalecreeklands/>

Twitter: [@CreekVisions](https://twitter.com/CreekVisions)

December 3, 2019

Dear Consultants, Councillors and CEO of Armidale Regional Council,

We are pleased to have been invited to participate in the development of the Armidale Regional Plan 2040. Our committee has resolved to put in writing our initial responses to your brief put to us in the email from Margaret Harvie of November 22.

We like the idea of an 'overarching strategy and vision for the future' - and our community association is keen to convey to you some of our priorities and ideas for the next 20 years.

As you may be aware, our association was the catalyst for the previous Council agreeing in mid 2017 to create a Master Plan for the Dumaresq Creeklands - which we are still to see. So, it will indeed be pleasing to see how the various strategies and master plans developed over recent years come together to help formulate this new 20 year vision.

Our initial reaction to your 10 themes - which encompass some 17 components - is that it is indeed broad! And yet, in this unprecedented drought being experienced across south-eastern Australia, the theme of 'water' is not included! We are shocked by this omission.

Since forming our not-for-profit association 2.5 years ago, which is building on ideas canvassed with the community from as far back as 2002, our membership has grown rapidly (over 50% in the past year) to the point that our cumulative lived experience in Armidale is now more than 1,500 years. We have opinions; we have ideas; we have lived through droughts, floods, hail storms, bush fires and water shortages. And we still love this city and want to enjoy it even more!

Before outlining the key elements of our vision, let's first address the 10 themes.

Comments on nominated 10 themes:

1. Growth - Economic and Employment

Making the central axis of Armidale a living, healthy, watery environment will greatly enhance the attractiveness of this highest city in the nation - to residents and visitors alike. When we realise our vision for the creeklands, it will become a 'go to' destination for tourists and would-be residents to visit, to live in and to see subsequent generations enjoy life. This is a city where, according to Google each morning, there is 'light traffic in your area"! Absolutely central to any growth will be addressing the management of water in this region (see more on our WEL proposal below).

2. Housing

Won't it be a boon for house prices along the creeklands when they have an overview of an attractive parkland with healthy waterways along the entire length of the city and beyond. Instead of installing colorbond fences, people will create bay windows overlooking the beautiful flowing water and birdlife that these improvements will bring about in this region.

3. Education

Our association plans to launch a competition (with substantial cash prizes) for primary and secondary students in 2020 to submit their class ideas for beautification, water health, urban design, bridge design, social amenity, sporting facilities, recreation facilities, etc. This is an essential step in bringing the next generations into the discussion on what ideas they have for our region and city. It will also yield exciting and inspiring concepts that will ensure the city's future. Armidale was the city chosen for Australia's first regional University, the University of New England (UNE), which commenced as a stand-alone university in 1954. Both the city of Armidale and UNE are adjacent to the main waterway of the region, Dumaresq Creek. The university has a proud history of understanding our region through studies of Natural Resources through the late Prof John Burton who developed a 3-D physical model of the entire catchment area. There is also extensive expertise in aquatic ecology including nationally recognised methods of treating water using biofilters to enhance water quality in streams. We see that our creeklands could be improved to such an extent that all can see the watery connection between the university and the city, similar to how students in Cambridge UK enjoy punting along the River Cam.

No doubt both undergraduate and postgraduate students can be involved in projects relevant to improving the creeklands and the city - from studies of urban planning to flood mitigation, Aboriginal archaeology, energy capture, biodiversity, aquatic ecology, tourism, engineering of sustainable water transport, etc. Our list of suggestions for potential research projects has been shared with academic staff at UNE.

4. Sports, Recreation and Open Space

There are so many sports and recreation facilities already in the creeklands environment. However, many of the sport fields are subjected to episodic flooding events which can create damage to valuable infrastructure. Ideally, Armidale should plan to ensure that future developments of sporting fields are above the flood zone. Were this to happen - for example through a Building Stronger Regional Communities grant - this would free up areas of the creeklands that could be excavated to create billabongs and wetlands without exacerbating flood potential. The areas of open space along the creeklands are substantial - most of it has, over many decades, been secured under Council ownership. We have not had access to Council's GIS plans but we estimate the area of the creeklands may be of the order of 300 ha which is comparable to that of Centennial Parklands in Sydney and Central Park in New York city. The area may even be larger - why don't we explore options to link the Dumaresq Dam recreation area with the city of Armidale along its full 13 km stretch of Dumaresq Creek?

This extensive area is ripe for development for recreation and enjoyment as well as for encouraging life which depends on riparian zones such as waterbirds, frogs, fish, etc.

The World Mountain Biking championships are to be held in Armidale - this could be a catalyst to develop bike trails along the length of Dumaresq Creek from Dumaresq Dam all the way to Armidale and beyond to Blue Hole 16 km to the south-east of the city.

If we had some foot/cycle bridges over a number of causeways and bridges of the city, we could hold events such as more parkrun venues, half-marathons or marathons and have long cycle trails that would avoid the need for families with children to cross busy streets.

However, the areas along the creeklands need to be made more attractive so they are used by many; this will likely reduce the level of anti-social behaviour that at times discourages recreational use of the creeklands. Improvements such as kiosk and toilet facilities, better pathways and improved lighting are all necessary. The more people that use these facilities the less likely unacceptable behaviour will occur.

5. Health

The Creeklands have already been the site for active participation (e.g. tree planting, visiting aboriginal sites, etc.) of disability groups and much more could be made of the creeklands facilities to assist this section of the community (both indigenous and non-indigenous).

The health of the broader community will also benefit from more development of recreational and sporting facilities along the creeklands. All of this exercise would be good for the general health of the city's residents and visitors.

6. Transport and Connectivity

As mentioned above under recreation, Armidale would benefit from careful planning of its connectivity options. Some of our city's causeways would be better as

attractive bridges. For example, an attractive arched bridge could be built over Dumaresq Creek just north of the Centro shopping complex, especially if the creek were enlarged into a billabong or lake and it were moved to the north away from the new Motel being built at the Ex-Services Club.

7. Tourism

It is clear from our investigations of other cities and towns with water as a focus that they are attractive to tourists. Whether it be San Antonio in Texas, Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra, the river features of Stanthorpe or Bombala or Lake Benalla in Victoria, it is obvious that these types of developments are attractive to tourists. Just imagine replacing the 100 year old Stephens Bridge on Marsh St with a magnificent arched stone-lined bridge as a Reconciliation Bridge! Looking down onto a series of interlinked ponds or billabongs with gabions and water being recycled to ensure sufficient oxygen to keep the water healthy - with a cafe on raised flood-free land overlooking the water - who would *not* want to stop for a visit?

8. Agriculture

In spite of the region's current extreme drought conditions, the Northern Tablelands is known as part of the 'high rainfall' zone of Australia which, to date, has relied principally on rain-fed agriculture such as extensive grazing of sheep and cattle. Unlike countries such as the USA and Brazil, Australia does not have very large areas with both productive soil and favourable rainfall; so areas like the Northern Tablelands are a precious resource for the nation.

The region has also recently been the chosen location for intensive glasshouse horticulture on an industrial scale near Guyra. Some see the land as having little value and would like to see it covered in solar panels for creating power for distant cities. Others see it as beautiful undulating country that is the subject of inspiring poetry. Still others see it as their country - inseparable from 60,000 years of stewardship.

Whatever the views of the beholder, the land does have beauty and value. It needs to be well managed and valued - not only by landowners but by the broader community. Any rain-fed agriculture depends on water and the capture and retention of sunlight and nutrients in efficient systems. The area supports perennial pastures and trees and some areas of commercial forestry exist in the region. Much more extensive cultivation of trees for harvest and storage of carbon and for downstream processing and manufacture would be feasible in the region if greater financial incentives and resource security existed for landholders. We could learn a lot from New Zealand about commercially viable timber production.

We see that the careful management of water in our environment is absolutely key to the future of this region. By carefully planning the management of land, water and energy, this city and its university can contribute to a bright future, and serve as an example for other inland regions of Australia.

9. Arts - Culture and Social

Armidale is already recognised as a centre of arts and culture with a long history of

investments and patronage. Council used to support a City or the Arts strategy and this support could be reinstated.

Institutions like the ACCKP, NERAM and NECOM are the envy of the nation. It is also a city with wonderful multi-cultural activities supported by its diverse population that hosts culture festivals and makes the city such a vibrant cosmopolitan experience. But so much more is possible!

We have liaised with representatives of the local Aboriginal community and we share their view that the creeklands should be recognised as an important area of significant cultural heritage for our first peoples. Together we can achieve that goal and help bridge the gap between different groups within our city. We feel that it may well be appropriate to rename the creek to reflect its long history of use by Aboriginal peoples. There is a need to acknowledge Biiami, the creator of rivers and creeks, and to protect important sites along the creeklands such as a large stone used for spear sharpening. We also should acknowledge the creeklands catchment starts near Duembandyi (or Mt Duval). Much could be done by providing interpretive signage and tours for all to learn about the creek's long history.

For many years, Armidale has sought to develop a major Performing Arts centre. This could serve not only to help bring major productions to the city, such as those which are attracted to the Glass House theatre in Port Macquarie, but could also be carefully designed with ancillary smaller theatres to be suitable for hosting international conferences in association with UNE as well as commercial conventions. Our association would favour locating such a Performing Arts centre with views of the extensive wetlands and billabongs we envisage being created along the central axis of the city.

We would also encourage investigations of the possibility of an outdoor performance space or amphitheatre within the creeklands precinct. We have been told of one potential site located near the creeklands within the UNE grounds which may have a capacity for outdoor seating of thousands.

10. Sustainability, Biodiversity and Smart City

Without clarification, these are three big, loosely defined concepts.

Sustainability, in our view, is a term which is often simplified to the glib claim that 'we can keep on doing this'. Our association favours a definition which states that sustainability allows the current generation of humans to enjoy the use of natural resources so long as they do not diminish the value of those natural resources for future generations.

Clearly, as far as our city's central creeklands are concerned, with the benefit of hindsight, we have not managed the creeklands 'sustainably' as this generation now needs to clean up what was done to our creek via pollution from the gas works by previous generations.

Some of the city's important infrastructure lies buried beneath the creeklands precinct. The entire sewer system drains under gravity to the lowest point along the city valley where large sewer pipes and vent pipes can be found along most of the length of Dumaresq Creek. Many would say that piping human waste underneath our main waterway is not a sustainable solution. We need a long-term plan to move

our sewer system away from the creeklands so that billabongs and wetlands can be created without the risk of human effluent leaking into them. Also, if an area was to be inundated, this would make any maintenance of sewer pipes very difficult. Similarly, some parts of the city have underground pipes for potable water and electricity conduits and these may need to be relocated if they were to interfere with improvements to the stream and/or billabongs or wetlands. Careful long-term planning of infrastructure is needed.

In the interests of sustainability, our association believes that Armidale Regional Council must make a permanent commitment that no buildings will be constructed within the flood prone zone of Dumaresq Creek.

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, we should acknowledge that our city and region has been too complacent in its dependence on Malpas Dam for its urban water supply for over 50 years. A reading of the history of the water supply problems in this city would have informed all of us that Armidale has faced many water crises before. We believe the city needs a more robust water supply.

Much of the beauty of this city is in its tree lined streets and in backyards. The residents of this city need to be able to maintain as many of our trees and gardens as possible - not just those in the 4 ha of Central Park - to allow us to enjoy this high country with its high levels of UV radiation with its health consequences. We need the shade, especially in summer. And the more water that trees transpire, the more water is released to the atmosphere allowing rain to fall again from the sky. It is regrettable that our city's Open Gardens weekend had to be cancelled this year. Also, we need to acknowledge that the environmental flows along the Dumaresq Creeklands have been substantially reduced due to a major intervention built near the top of the catchment, Dumaresq Dam. This was Armidale's first water storage dam built in 1898. This is not to say that we want the dam removed - we don't. But we must acknowledge that the environmental flows have been greatly reduced by the construction of this dam and, to compensate for the lack of environmental flows, we need to explore ways of finding other sources of water and/or recycling water within our creeklands environment.

Regarding biodiversity, we contend that it needs to be seen as more than just a motherhood statement. We support the removal of weedy species and planting with native species along the creeklands by the Armidale Urban Rivercare Group - for aesthetic reasons as well as for the ecosystem services they provide as wildlife corridors which have already increased the diversity of birdlife along the waterways. This city should be supporting the creation of functioning healthy ecosystems that support all life - whether it be nutrient cycling microorganisms, fish, frogs or turtles. To do this, we support creative use of water recycling and treatment of city run-off through natural filtration systems in purpose-built ponds such as those developed by UNE's aquatic ecology group.

We support the enhancement of Armidale as a 'smart' city if that means we plan carefully and strategically for the long-term future - not just adopt it as a cute buzzword. One might say that our city has plenty of 'smart' citizens; this is one reason that we believe Armidale is such a special place in Australia. But let's not claim that we are 'smart' - rather let's be consultative, thoughtful, deliberate and plan

for sensible long-term futures.

As one of the key instigators of Newcastle's successful renewal and author of the book *Creating Cities*, Marcus Westbury, wrote: "Our towns and cities were wasting their most precious resource: the initiative and imagination of their citizens."

Our association believes that we have distilled considerable imagination from our members and the members of the community groups we have engaged with. We trust that some of our ideas will be given credence by those developing this 2040 plan for the city and region. Our region needs appropriate long-term planning with input from those who deeply understand this part of an ancient and unique bioregion of inland Australia that is so different to the mostly urban priorities of those who govern us from Macquarie St in Sydney.

Our Vision is WEL

Our proposal, in brief, is for the development of our city and region according to our overarching WEL vision: "**Water Equals Life**". This will see us develop into the region with the best quality of life (for all organisms) in Australia!

Our association's aim is: "To assist in the careful planning, design and development of beautiful, healthy and safe public spaces featuring wetlands, lagoons and billabongs, connected by flowing water along the Armidale Creeklands".

We support the development of user-friendly infrastructure such as attractive bridges, paths and cycle ways, play and recreation areas, along with performance and creative spaces which will complement water features and improve the quality of life, economy and beauty of Armidale.

More water features will encourage tourism, grow the economy and provide educational and research opportunities. An enhanced creeklands environment will see more environmental flows of water supporting healthy life along the entire centre axis of the city - supporting water birds, frogs, eels, fish, invertebrates, etc. Billabongs, lagoons, ponds and wetlands will greatly enhance the recreational opportunities and enjoyment of all residents as well as visitors to the region.

Visions for Armidale Creeklands Inc aims to collaborate with the wider community by seeking the visions of the aboriginal community, sporting associations, recreational users, the business community, educational institutions, residents and visitors of all ages and those wanting environmental protection, stream health, wildlife corridors, native vegetation and deciduous colour.

In developing our ideas, we have to date held two public meetings, hosted three bus tours along the creeklands, met with the Mayor and CEO of the current Council, several Council officers, several representatives of the University of New England, representatives of the

Armidale Urban Rivercare Group, Southern New England Landcare, the local Aboriginal community and the Sports Council.

More information about what inspires our imagination can be found on our [website](#) where we show images of some of our favourite wet cities, towns, features, playgrounds, etc.

We have taken great inspiration from the careful planning of water in another inland city, Canberra, the landscaping and water features in Sydney Park and from reading 'The People's Park: Centennial Park - a history' and by following their many events on their @CentParklands Twitter feed.

Our efforts with social media have focused mainly on Facebook posts. Thus far, we have accumulated 173 likes and have received no negative feedback at all - this gives us hope that we are succeeding in our efforts to develop a consensus. Our most successful Facebook post reached some 2,300 people with 540 of those engaging with that post.

To date, we have distilled community opinion into a series of key points, many of which we have incorporated into the relevant themes above. Some additional points are worthy of emphasis:

- **Water should flow continuously along the creeklands** in order to provide a healthy well-oxygenated stream to support all life and enjoyment along this important artery of our city.
(Our association has taken advice from a professional irrigation engineer with Darling Irrigation (Dubbo) who has outlined the feasibility and given approximate costings (\$360K) of pumping water from the east end of Dumaresq Creek upstream over 7 km to Lake Zot and allowing it to flow back along the creek). (This proposal has been copied to all of our members and to all ARC Councillors and the CEO).
- **We want to create at least 9 billabongs, wetlands and/or lagoons within the city** (see Diagram 1 below). Of these, we believe that sites 1 and 8 near the centre of the city (Curtis and Civic Parks) are the most important followed by sites 2 (near TAFE), 3 (wetland south of Donnelly St), site 6 (west of the city bypass) and site 4 near Canambe St where a small lake could be constructed.

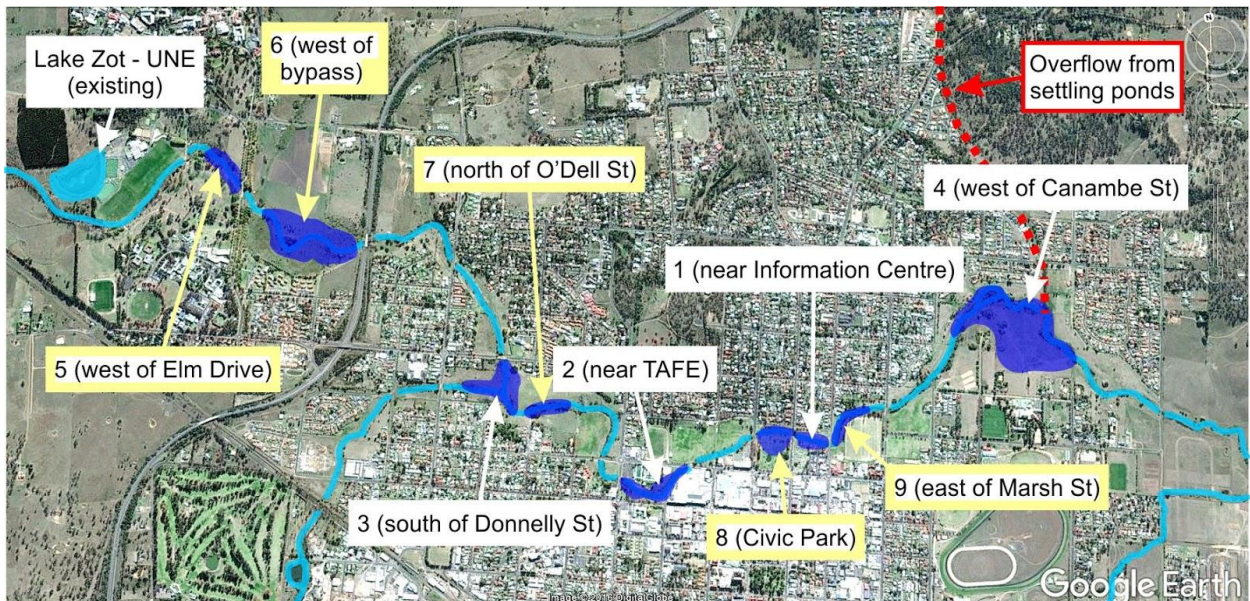


Diagram 1. Priority candidate areas chosen to date by Visions for Armidale Creeklands Inc. These billabongs and wetlands are shown along much of Dumaresq Creek with the red line showing overflow from Water Treatment Plant settling ponds which could be pumped upstream to Lake Zot at UNE so it can flow back through the city.

- The **creeklands recreational facilities need to be developed** to increase their value and use by all residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. More use will mean the entire precinct will become safer which will result in positive feedback by residents and visitors and will make it easier to maintain quality facilities as vandalism will be reduced.
- We suggest that once water is recycled through the city, it will be feasible to **provide water for irrigation of grass areas** - such as the golf course, the race course and sporting fields - using metered pumps under license from the creek itself. This would avoid the use of potable water for irrigating sporting fields and the racecourse - a practice we feel is most unwise. This is consistent with NSW Planning's goal to "Sustainably manage and conserve water resources" and to "Encourage the use of alternate water sources on local government assets, including playing fields." (p35, New England North West Regional Plan 2036).
- We suggest that **all water flows in the catchment be monitored in real time** both to help manage risk during flood events and also to maximise the efficiency of water capture, storage and use during non-flood times.
- We encourage the **creation of small waterfalls and riffles along the creeklands** to help maintain adequate oxygen in the water resulting in a healthy ecosystem.
- **Creating deeper ponds or wetlands** will help reduce the abundance of native reeds enabling more extensive views of water without exacerbating flooding.
- Our members are in favour of a greater focus being given to **magnificent trees along the creeklands**, including native trees and those with deciduous colour. This might include a botanic garden; interest in this has been expressed by academics from the University of New England.

- We are particularly inspired by **creative and safe playgrounds such as the Wild Play garden in Centennial Park.**
- We acknowledge the need for the **provision of sufficient picnic spots and parking** places to enable access to the creeklands
- Our members are in favour of **installations of sculptures** in parts of the creeklands precinct.

For the information of Council and its consultants, we provide in the following appendix a complete listing of **members' responses to two detailed surveys** which our association conducted over the past two years. These survey responses indicate members' preferences for creekland features and their ranking of suggestions which came from our membership. This evidence from the community provides support for the suggestions we have made here in this document and elsewhere.

We look forward to being involved with Council and its consultants as the Armidale Regional Plan 2040 is developed.

Yours sincerely,

The committee of Visions for Armidale Creeklands Inc
Graham Wilson (Vice President)
Liz Fulloon (Secretary)
Peter Galbraith (Treasurer)
Martin Levins (IT)
Les Davis (Armidale Business Chamber rep)
Don Hardman
Jim Reid
Hani Soliman
Jim Scott (President)

Appendix

Members' responses to Survey 1 on **preferences** (ranked from strongly agree to agree)

- Improving water features should be possible whilst improving native vegetation and soil protection
- Improving water features along the creek is likely to attract more birdlife
- If any water features are created it is important that flooding should not be made any worse
- Should explore storing water upstream of Armidale to buffer floods and allow for continuous flow of water
- Ideally creeklands should have continuously flowing water so that the water does not become stagnant
- Playgrounds in regional cities and towns should be just as good as those in Australia's cities
- Could create bicycle and/or running path between Armidale and Dumaresq Dam
- We should find a way to remediate any contaminated soil along the creeklands
- Well designed pedestrian or vehicle bridges would enhance the beauty and function around the creeklands
- Toilet facilities such as those shown for Sydney Park are important for the success of playground areas
- A combination of trees and shade cloth would be best for providing shade in our playgrounds
- Native vegetation is important along the creeklands
- Would like to see some small waterfalls/riffles such as those shown in Sydney Park to provide oxygen in water
- Like to see more research done along the creeklands environment to enhance our knowledge
- Armidale's playgrounds need to be designed to withstand damage during occasional flood events
- High radiation means it is important that shading be provided for playgrounds
- Would like to see students in our schools university and or TAFE undertake projects to help plan our creeklands
- Autumn colour is important along the creeklands
- Black swans swimming in water features near downtown Armidale would be a sign of good health of the stream
- I think playground areas for toddlers should be fenced
- Some would like to construct lagoons along the creeklands to replicate some of these natural features
- Having a kiosk eg as shown for Sydney Park or a cafe is important for the success of a playground area
- If there were more water features along the creeklands I would be more likely to picnic

- A playground on both sides of the creek with some crossing stepping stones or foot bridges would be good
- Ground cover in playgrounds with natural materials such as sand or fine bark are better than rubberised surfaces

Members' responses to Survey 2 on **suggestions** from members (ranked from strongly agree to agree)

- Consider sources of government funding at both State and Federal levels
- Farmers Markets have to be accommodated appropriately in the creeklands region
- Bridges over the creek, walkways and outdoor performance are worth considering
- Need to consider existing infrastructure eg water sewer electricity etc
- Need to take into account flood mitigation
- Upgraded creative playgrounds with some facilities fenced for children's safety
- Discussion needed with sporting groups with regard to their requirements
- State of the art playground should involve consultation with the next generation
- It should be done in stages and this is possible with forward planning
- Need to consider possible sites for future water features
- Needs of all residents regardless of age should be provided for
- Remove or reduce other disruptive introduced species from the creeklands
- Recreational areas ie more BBQs seating in shade
- Separate walk and cycleways with improved quality of pavement
- Should liaise closely with the Armidale Urban Rivercare Group
- Stanthorpe and Inverell are nearby examples of good practice in managing waterways
- This is a long-term project which must involve the whole community
- Waterways such as in other centres would be great
- Creek to have clear naturally running water and be regularly checked for rubbish etc
- A cafe along the creeklands which is open on weekends
- Cycleway signs need to be restored
- Investigate aboriginal totem for area
- Lomandra plantings to create sinuous curved hedges to soften the area and keep visibility high
- Maintain quality cycleway for its whole length
- More lakes ponds wetlands for everyone to enjoy
- Remove the stone drain in favour of wider, more visible natural water with flood mitigation
- Reduce heavy reed infestations in creeklands
- Research into physiography, hydrology, floods, oxygenation, contamination and weeds
- Contaminated soil downstream from the old gas works needs to be addressed
- The stone channel design needs to be reviewed
- There is room here for more sculpture
- A city-centred venue for theatre, conferences etc will invigorate the City and the Malls

- Consider entire Dumaresq Creek catchment and all projects rather than just water vistas
- An amphitheatre for performances to increase cultural venues
- Like the idea of slowing down the water with features similar to those in Black Gully
- Remove stone drain in central creek area in Armidale
- Consider area north of Claude St flats - west of bypass - beautify link to UNE
- Rationalising of sporting fields to meet the demands of different groups
- Areas of water if quality is good enough for swimming canoeing etc
- Get rid of the weeds in the creek around Queen Elizabeth Drive
- Review creek bed through and east and west of University of New England
- Could enlarge vision by looking at water resources in whole region
- Install solar lighting of creeklands
- Remove stone drain containing the Creek allowing for a lagoon in this area