

Next Generation 
BROOKTON

Book 3. December 2017

Focus Group Feedback

Background

This material is a compilation of verbal one-on-one feedback and responses from:

CBH	Co-operative Bulk Handling, Brookton region.
WALGA	Western Australian Local Government Authority
RDA	Regional Development Authority
WDC	Wheatbelt Development Commission
OTMS	Brookton Old Time Motor Show'
ADAMS	ADAMS Bus Services
Baptistcare WA	Not-for-profit residential aged care, at home services, retirement living and disability services
UWA Future Farm	University of Western Australia Future Farm 2050 Project, which aims to imagine the best-practice farm of 2050, and build and manage it now

Growth

OTMS: We have no aim to double the numbers or anything like that. We're here to retain the 'old time' element. Restore and preserve old time gear. We want people to smell it, touch it, and we aren't wanting much to change from that. Last time we introduced the photo booth for young people and that was popular.

The event is getting bigger gradually though. We contribute about \$30k back to the community and we have hundreds of locals involved. The farmers put in so much effort. It is very taxing on the community though.

CBH: Our current site is constrained and our next site will be built within two years. We are looking for a new site, a green-field site, and are doing our due diligence and feasibility at the moment. Once this is agreed, we will be building in the next 12 months and it will take six months to build.

RDA: The low levels of diversification are an issue for the future growth of Brookton, although it's close to the pickup area of Perth, which is a good thing. We'd suggest Brookton monitors its needs and considers creative ways to grow or move forward from where it is now. We'd suggest using evidence to move forward. Also of interest, Narembeen has created an enterprise shareholder model, basically meaning they invest in themselves.

Baptistcare: We have earmarked Brookton for an exciting level of development and growth. Consider a Lifestyle Village approach. We wish to work with partners who can provide 'speed in decision making'. We may need to go through test phases or pilot phases and then expand if there is support. We need partners who can sit at the table and be open to growth and change. We need to hear from the community/partner the types of behaviours such as 'willingness' and 'we'll find a way'.

UWA Future Farm: We do have a development plan for Pingelly/Brookton. We tried to complement local development. For instance, we wished to play a part in the recycling and new energy as well. We wished to capture water from the roof of the new recreation centre, but it hasn't happened. Often better decisions are made in a non-political environment. Negotiations are easier. We wish to grow in all facets, like the Federally funded Greening Australia program (noting Seabrook is doing the same Greening Australia program over four to five years). Our Office of Indigenous Affairs is looking for projects too.

ADAMS Bus Service: ADAMS completes three different types of services through Brookton: day tour to and from Wave Rock, charter service upon request and in-bound services. Brookton has its stop at Stumpy's only for a stop-over, beverage refresh, and toilet stop. "There is no other reason they stop at Brookton. It's a very long day for customers and we're only stopping for services, not as a tourist."

WALGA: Success for the community could be very different for success for the Shire, or business, or partners, etc. This is okay, and it needs to be demonstrated in these plans. WALGA suggests a 'stacked' approach – make it obvious what each group sees as success.

The role of LG is not just geography. It's a business. We need to grow our thinking that it's not just a place to live. Brookton needs to grow a philosophy, of what the Shire is there for and what it's not there for. The Strategic Community Plan should be filled with outcomes of 'mindfulness', not just physical outcomes. The Strategic Community Plan is for residents (both rate payers and renters), business (owners and workers), Council, Visitors, and Partners (prosperity, economic development). We often forget that it's not just about the 'rate payers'.

WDC: We have been interested in other regions growing secondary industries on top of their agricultural expertise. This is not new industry altogether, but rather secondary value-adding along the supply chain model. Manjimup is doing pressurised packaging of food, based on wasted products (such as avocados in packaging for babies and those in aged care). I believe Brookton is well placed to do something like this, being so close to Perth. It has the human capital and the knowhow due to the successful agricultural workforce.

The technology upgrades in Brookton better places it to co-ordinate a Business Hub of shared workspaces. A farmer's wife told me she hides in the shed to do her work so the kids couldn't find her. There are a few buildings in Brookton under-utilised: repurpose these, offer affordable rent, shared services, provide internet and Brookton will be capitalising on such small business networks.

Population

RDA: We have forecast Brookton (and similar regions) to decrease its agricultural population by 40% over the next five to ten years due to the 'new economy'. Of the 42 Shires, only six have grown in population

in the last five years and they are the Shires with high levels of diversification, not just agriculture. Almost no regions are achieving growth. Some regions are working on a 'repopulation strategy'. It takes years to pull off and only seems to work when you have the same President and same CEO in the area for ten years plus. It needs to include housing, industry, workforce structures, and a marketing strategy to leverage it all. Bruce Rock is doing it well. They are focussing on shifting their drive in and drive out workforce and incentivising them to stay permanently in the region. They did their homework, though; they knew their facts and figures. They worked with industry partners to find out the employee numbers and behaviours.

UWA Future Farm: It took about five years for us to gain traction working with partners in and around Pingelly. It does take time.

Baptistcare: We need to work with Indigenous population for their care, but also to help them work in this field as well. They need to be housed, so having a high local, housed and settled Indigenous population to start with is a bonus. That makes people employable. We'd like to deliver the services to an area greater than Brookton. There could be a regional service model, based in Brookton.

WDC: We all know Brookton has an excellent proximity to Perth, but what we don't know is why this is a competitive advantage. We need to package this story better. Brookton is much better placed to attract the Lifestyle Town or E-changers than other regions (which are currently looking at this). Is the story about the 'strength of the community?' If so, we need to understand this and articulate this. Is it good at catering for people who don't want the big city any more, is it neighbourly, is it safe, does it have good health and aged care? Just because it's a small community doesn't always mean it's cohesive. We need to know all of these factors to make the proximity to Perth a good selling point. There is a big trend of moving back to the country – can Brookton tell a better story? There's some really good matrix of statistics in the Sub-Regional Strategy documents which may be helpful.

OTMS: We attract about 50% of attendees from Pingelly, Beverley, and Brookton, 30% from Perth, and 20% from Geraldton through to Albany. There's a lot of pressure on families in agriculture, and this has bearing on mental health and the services we can offer together.

ADAMS Bus Service: The services are offered to

operate seven days per week, 365 days per year and run 80% of the time (they don't run when the numbers are too low, which is 20% of the time). The average number of people on board is 20. They stop twice, there and back. The age range of visitors is 20 to 60 typically. The younger market is typically back packers. There's been a huge recent influx of Singaporean, Malay, and other Asian travellers in the last few years. The European market is making a recovery. Domestic visitor numbers have dropped off as they are driving themselves more now.

Issues

CBH: We have two issues. Firstly there's not enough housing for staff in Brookton, including temporary or transient staff. It's too expensive for us to provide more housing ourselves. Secondly, there are inconsistent energy supplies. We all know the power in the Wheatbelt is not sustainable. We have a huge power problem. We also have to consider truck traffic, and own fuelling, at the site. We have created an app for the growers and they have adapted really well. We'll stick with diesel, not battery operated trucks for a while. We'll also have longer trains due to increased production.

UWA Future Farm: We have issues with accommodation. In general we have five lots of people needing accommodation five times per year. But on top of this we could bring up to 50 people from backpacker standard housing to better housing, requiring several nights, if we could. We can have 20 people coming in from China for instance. We want to be able to do this, but driving the two hours before and after ruins a six hour day. We have analysed investing in accommodation before but it didn't add up. We also tried to convince WACHS not to knock down the historic hospital in Pingelly, give us the dollars it would have spent on demolition, and we would have use the hospital for accommodation. We'd like to do a public private deal to improve our accommodation needs in Brookton/Pingelly. A group like CBH's accommodation needs would be in a very different peak time to our needs. Pingelly is seven minutes away, Brookton is 12. It doesn't matter which way we go – it depends on which town can help us sooner rather than later. Pingelly is now a university town, but we can't have a single-town university; we wish to spread out through even to Wickpin. We have a bigger, broader focus than just Pingelly.

RDA: Brookton is disadvantaged, or is a victim of low levels of lifelong learning. We all need to work on educating all people so decisions can be better

made and trust is built up. We need to shift the conversation in Brookton for sure. There is also a challenge in Brookton between day-to-day tasks and factoring in bigger pictures. We need to allow the Shire time and resources to achieve the bigger outcomes. In a word, we'd suggest 'cohesiveness'. Brookton would really benefit from binding the big picture together – it's all there to be tied together. Four to five projects could be brought forward and the Council would be the glue to work it altogether as a system. But the community has to know that the Council will be being less reactive to immediate needs, and less reactive to the loudest people, as it will be trying to build a stronger ten year position.

WDC: Water seems to be okay in Brookton, but power supply is not. Technology has certainly improved.

Baptistcare: We don't have anywhere to house fifth year students. We need dead-level land to build upon and a very sustainable and dependable energy supply.

WALGA: There is a gap in Council/Councillors' positioning (alignment, decision making model, frameworks to operate under). This is not a Brookton matter, but rather one that affects all Councils. It would be good if all Councillors operated towards a strategy and made decisions under such a strategy. Ensure this Strategic Community Plan is non-formulaic, though. We don't want plans being the same everywhere – they need to suit the region and suit those having to use it. Remember, the 'reporting' side is just as important as the 'planning side'. We need to be able to see 'success' and what that success looks like to different people. There is a legislative need to be very transparent.

Jobs

Baptistcare: We can see Brookton as a training hub, too. There is a continuum needed in education from out of school through to ongoing education. We wish to help locals to be employable, as that will help us too.

RDA: The data is showing us that we are short of a place to train disability workers in the region. Someone just has to reach out and grab that role. The other focus could be the school. Bruce Rock has been very focussed on school outcomes, offering both in-hand support and unique community mentoring. The entire town invests in the school, as they believe the future of the town is about educating. Education is not just about the young kids; its life-long education

the town is investing in. The Shire is the enabling mechanism for such a culture. The opportunity in Brookton is in aged care. There is such a short fall in disability services for the region and Brookton has the basis to work hard in this area. From the developing infrastructure, the region should bounce off this and create a training hub for the rest of the region. There is a big demand: there's a forecast 600 more jobs in disability services. It's an industry just waiting to be grabbed.

UWA Future Farm: We employ one more staff member than a typical farm.

WDC: We know broad-acre agricultural will employ fewer people in the future, due to expected automation. Job creation is important to sustain a region. We see that equally in secondary industry (to capitalise on and not change the culture of the region) and new industry. New industry would have to be aged care. The estimates coming out of the effect of NDIS is that of very, very big job growth. Northam is doing some great insight work, in particular to care and the Indigenous population (also in job counts for Indigenous people).

We can also see the possibilities in Indigenous Tourism. Some places are doing great work in this area, and Brookton, with its very well-organised Seabrook, should be capitalising on this as well. We have a long list of things to do within the Indigenous arena, and Brookton should be working hard on this. Indigenous Tourism is a hugely growing sector and Brookton should be partnering with tour businesses around Merredin and in Perth, and working in partnership with Seabrook. The Asian visitors are really looking for authentic Indigenous experiences, so too the people from Perth, and Brookton could be the one, being so close in proximity and having an organised partner in Seabrook.

CBH: We don't think we'd expect a big increase in jobs due to this change. It'll probably mean about five more staff during harvest time that's all. They'll be casual local staff and some from Perth. We'll also be redeploying staff from Aldersyde. We have an indigenous employment policy.

Final Thoughts

Baptistcare: We'd go in with adaptive technologies and provide a demo or model house to begin with, possibly in 2018. We'd really appreciate any insights and trends about population and industry in and around Brookton. That will help with our business case too when we try to get partners involved, as well as for claiming funding options. A good partnership is a very exciting prospect to us.

ADAMS: We won't ever stop in Brookton for tourism reasons. We only stop there now because it's exactly halfway to the tourist destinations. It's just a service stop to us. ADAMS has a Tourism Services Manager whom would be interested in continual communication. ADAMS was recently awarded the Australian National Bus Operator of the Year – Achiever Award amongst 2000 nominees.

CBH: With this growth there will be no profile change; it's already a massive site and it will be a massive site again. It's just part of our Network Strategy. It's all about efficiencies for us, as we'll go from 200 sites to 100 sites in ten years. We'll have longer trains with our Network Strategy.

RDA: Brookton shouldn't focus on tourism, as it doesn't have the natural assets to compete. It's a very expensive and resource-intensive business model. We need to know the value of the home-based or SME business sector.

WDC: In 2011, people aged 65+ accounted for 16.0% of the Wheatbelt South population. This is considerably above the average in metropolitan Perth (12.5%) and Western Australia (12.3%), highlighting the older population profile of the region. The local impacts of this global trend are already starting to reveal themselves, with employment in the health care and social assistance sectors recently overtaking retail as the largest employment sector in the WA economy.

WALGA: We suggest including ongoing strategic forums or workshops in these plans (meeting structures, regularity, long term, next generation thinking). Engagement is not just a one-off. This will make the process more efficient for all, including the Shire workers who can control the engagement process and not spend copious amounts of time on it. It will be a good case study seeing how Brookton people make a change in this direction. A region like this needs to build trust, and trust building takes time. And don't forget the environment.

UWA Future Farm: We presented to Brookton Shire about two years ago, but they didn't get that fired up. We look at contributing to the local economy, that's important to us- its part of our sustainable farm model. UWA is a comprehensive university, meaning we go across all industry. We can cross-populate all ideas. We look at small business enterprise in the regions too. We have a development plan for Pingelly/Brookton.

OTMS: We are solely for the benefit of the people of Brookton. It takes about 100 people to make the event happen.

Notes

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