

VISION STATEMENT

Showground Precinct

A VISION FOR A TRANSIT-ORIENTED URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

Prepared on behalf of Belvedere Landowners' Group
February 2016



Photo: Existing streetscape at Belverde Avenue.
Photo Source: Google Street View | **Cover Source:** Mecone – with data from OSM.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	04
2	Site Context	06
3	Housing and Demographics	10
4	Planning Summary	13
5	Challenges and Opportunities	16
6	The Vision	19
7	Conclusion	24

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Vision Statement has been prepared to support a submission to the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE), in relation to the exhibition of the draft Showground Station Precinct Proposal.

1–21 Belvedere Avenue and 8–26 Kathleen Avenue is located in Castle Hill, approximately 400m from the future Showground Station. This document sets out a vision for the development of the site, presenting an opportunity for medium density residential development consistent with the future mixed-use character of the precinct.

This submission is supported by and aligns with a second submission prepared by Mecone for adjoining land within the precinct to the west, between Showground Road and Kathleen Avenue, which suggests a similar built form be considered by the DPE. The submissions should be read in conjunction, and are supported by a landowner “Declaration of Unity”. This demonstrates the potential for the precinct north of Showground Road to be developed in the short-term, assisting in the immediate renewal of the Showground Precinct.

The vision is to develop the site, which is approximately 2ha in area, for residential purposes, supporting the development of the Showground precinct as a transit-oriented development. The development would provide high quality housing in the area and assist The Hills Council in achieving its dwelling targets for the local government area (LGA) and to support the significant infrastructure investment by the State Government for the Sydney Metro.

1.2 THE SITE

The subject site is an entire street block bounded by Kathleen Avenue and Belvedere Avenue, Castle Hill, located to the northern side of Showground Road. The site is ideally located for transit-oriented development, soon to be connected via the Sydney Metro directly to the Sydney CBD in less than 1 hour and other major hubs such as Norwest, Chatswood, Macquarie University and Macquarie Park in less than 30 minutes. The site is currently developed for low density residential uses, comprising 22 detached dwellings on lots averaging 900sqm.



Figure 1: The subject site.
Source: Google Maps – modified by Mecone.

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The subject site is located in Northwest Sydney, approximately 25km from the Sydney CBD. The site has access to Greater Sydney, the Sydney CBD, Sydney Airport and Port Botany via the Orbital Motorway network, which is located approximately 5km to the south.

A Plan for Growing Sydney locates the site within Sydney’s “West Central” Subregion. This subregion will be a significant area for growth and infrastructure development over the next 20 years, supported by the growth of Greater Parramatta as Sydney’s second CBD, 10km to the south.

The Global Economic Corridor, which contains a heavy concentration of Sydney’s knowledge jobs and generates over 41% of New South Wales’ Gross State Product, also extends through the site.

The precinct is within an Urban Renewal Corridor, which stretches the length of the Sydney Metro. This corridor will undergo major changes in the near future, with development potential unlocked from the opening of the new rapid transit line.

DISTANCES AND DIRECTIONS	
Castle Hill	1 km ↘
Norwest	3 km ←
Rouse Hill	8 km ↗
Blacktown	9 km ↙
Hornsby	10 km ↗
Parramatta	10 km ↓
Macquarie Park	13 km ↘
Chatswood	19 km ↘
Sydney CBD	25 km ↘

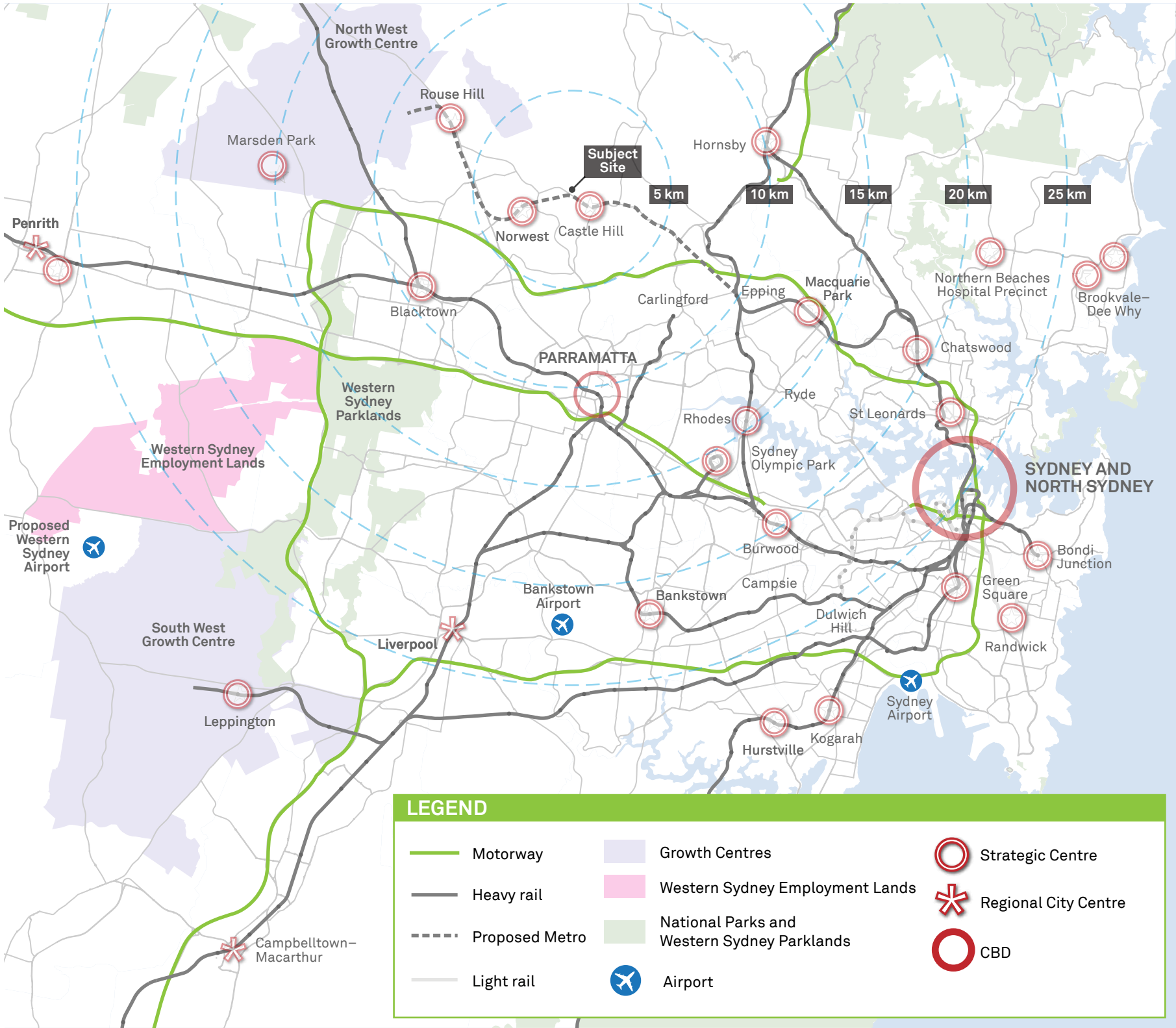


Figure 2: The regional context of the subject site.
Source: Mecone.

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.2 LOCAL CONTEXT

Surrounding land uses are predominantly low density residential, consisting of detached housing on lots in excess of 800m². Land on the northern side of Kathleen Avenue is identified for environmental living and has lot sizes generally up to 4000m² in size.

The closest local centres are Castle Hill, approximately 1.2km to the east, and Norwest, 2.7km to the southwest. Both of these are 'Strategic Centres', and have been identified by the Department of Planning and Environment as containing capacity for additional mixed uses including offices, retail, services and housing.

The site is within proximity to a number of local services and amenities including schools, employment zones, and open space areas. Nearby schools include Castle Hill High School, Gilroy Catholic College, and the Hills Adventist College. Castle Hill Country Club is nearby to the site, whilst the Castle Hill Showground is within walking distance and has been identified by Council for future upgrades.

The future character of the immediate surrounding area will dramatically change following the completion of the Sydney Metro Northwest, with a significant increase in residential, retail, commercial, and recreation development. Showground Station will be approximately 400m or a 5 minute walk from the site.

The Castle Hill RSL, which contains a C2K Fitness and Aquatic Centre, is less than 400m to the east of the site. The RSL site is also immediately adjacent to the Castle Hill Bowling Club.



Figure 3: Castle Towers. | **Figure 4:** Typical Streetscape.
Source: Google Street View.

2. SITE CONTEXT

The site is well located to access nearby services and facilities:

WITHIN 500 METRES

- 1. Castle Hill RSL (including C2K Fitness and Aquatic Centre)
- 2. Castle Hill Showground

WITHIN 1 KILOMETRE

- 3. Castle Hill Bowling Club
- 4. Castle Hill High School
- 5. Cockayne Reserve
- 6. Fred Caterson Reserve

WITHIN 1.5 KILOMETRES

- 7. Samuel Gilbert Public School
- 8. Knightsbridge Shopping Centre
- 9. Castle Hill Public School
- 10. Castle Hill shops (including Castle Towers Shopping Centre)
- 11. Castle Hill Hospital
- 12. Coolong Reserve
- 13. Castle Hill Trading Zone

WITHIN 2 KILOMETRES

- 14. Castle Glen Reserve
- 15. Castle Hill Heritage Park
- 16. St Bernadette’s Primary School
- 17. Hills Adventist College
- 18. St Gabriel’s School for Hearing Impaired Children
- 19. Gilroy Catholic College
- 20. Excelsior Public School
- 21. TAFE – The Hills College



Figure 5: The local context of the site
Source: Google Maps – modified by Mecone.

3. HOUSING AND DEMOGRAPHICS

3.1 HOUSING DEMAND

The population of The Hills LGA will grow from 177,000 in 2011 to 280,000 in 2031. Population growth is anticipated to remain at or above 2% per annum in this time, far outpacing the average population growth in New South Wales and Sydney. The key driver of this population growth will be positive net overseas migration.

Dwelling numbers for the LGA are similarly expected to rise, from 59,650 in 2011 to 87,450 in 2031. This is a requirement of almost 2000 additional dwellings per year.

The Hills Shire has land within the North West Priority Growth Precinct, so growth is expected to occur through both greenfield housing and in-fill housing development. The Showground Station precinct itself has been earmarked to grow by between 3,400 and 3,800 dwellings to 2031, and will be required to absorb this growth through higher density development.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data shows that between 2006 and 2011, the median rent in The Hills LGA increased from \$320 to \$450 and the median monthly mortgage repayment increased from \$2062 to \$2570. Increases in median rent (40%) and mortgage repayments (22%) is exceeding the growth in median income (18%).

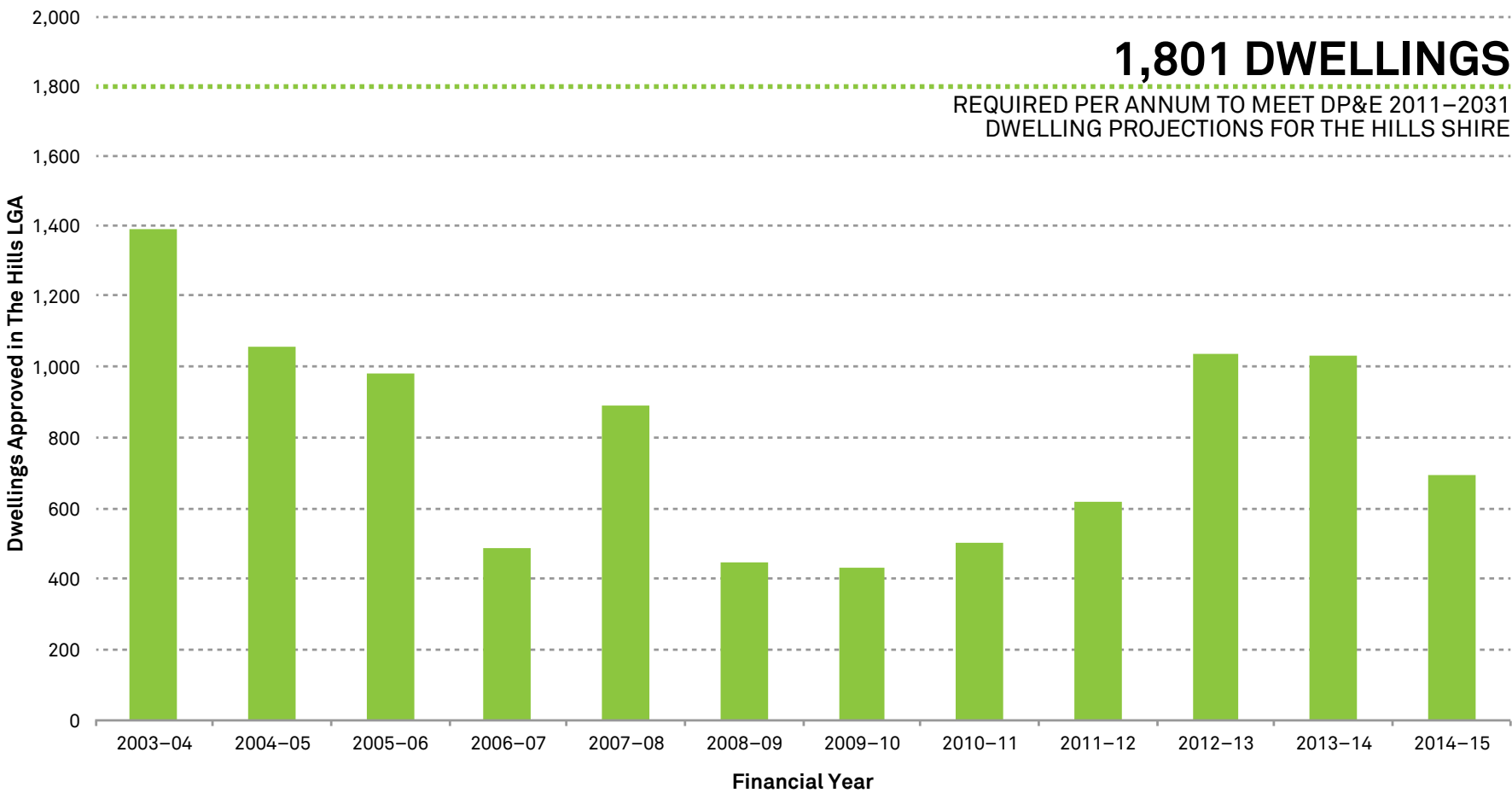


Figure 6: Net dwelling completions data for The Hills Shire between 2003-04 and 2014-15.
Source: Mecone – with data from Sydney Water.



Figures 7-10: Household and population statistics for The Hills Shire.
Source: Mecone – with data from the 2006 and 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Censuses and DP&E population forecasts.

3. HOUSING AND DEMOGRAPHICS

3.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

Family households are the predominant household type, and will continue to be prevalent into the future, with couples with children expected to make up approximately 50% of all household types in 2031.

However, The Hills will see an increase in the share of non-family households, particularly lone person households which will increase proportionally by 20%. Household sizes are also expected to slightly decrease to an average of 2.99 persons. These statistics demonstrate the need for alternative housing types in the future.

The 2011 ABS census shows that The Hills has an employment rate and median weekly income higher than the averages in New South Wales and Australia, with the most common occupations including Professionals, Clerical and Administrative Workers, and Managers. The median household income in 2011 was \$2044 per week.

There is expected to be a significant increase of jobs in The Hills LGA. Council anticipates 45,000 additional jobs along the Sydney Metro Northwest corridor by 2036. At the Showground Station precinct, there has been a jobs growth forecast between 6,800 and 13,700

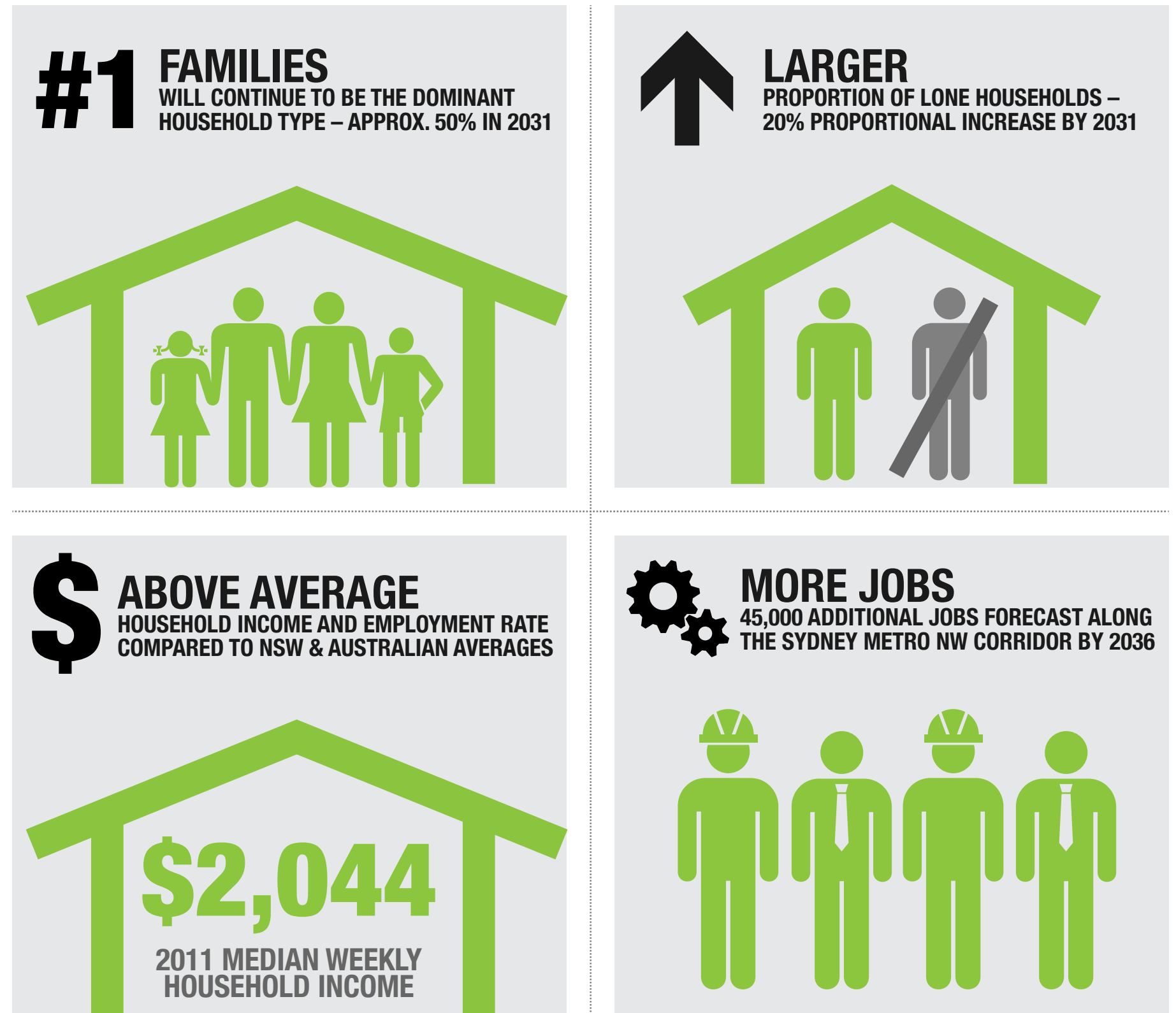


Figure 11–14: Demographical and employment statistics for The Hills Shire.
Source: Mecone – with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2011 Census, and The Hills Shire.

3.3 HOUSING SUPPLY CALCULATIONS

Utilising data released by the NSW Bureau of Transport (BTS), Mecone has analysed discrepancies between dwelling forecasts and dwelling supply in the Sydney area, and investigated how dwelling forecasts and completions correlate to capacity on the ground.

The Sydney metropolitan area has consistently tracked below the dwelling completion numbers required to meet 2036 projections, and it has become generally accepted that additional capacity and residential development is needed to meet the demand for housing. As an example, calculating data for the 2011 – 2015 shows that only four Sydney councils have recorded the number of dwelling completions required to meet or exceed forecasts.

LGAs that have successfully met their projections to 2015 have been able to take advantage of larger scale urban renewal sites, such as Wolli Creek in the Rockdale LGA or Rhodes West in the Canada Bay LGA. These areas are largely free from constraints such as strata titles, heritage areas, and fragmented land ownership. However, these urban renewal areas also have limited capacity, and will have this capacity exhausted in the near future. Following the completion of these urban renewal areas, the respective LGAs will then likely also fall below the dwelling projection rates and will need to identify new areas for redevelopment.

This analysis suggests that planning capacity on the ground must significantly exceed that which would be assumed to meet the targets, and that it is primarily the large urban renewal districts which are bolstering dwelling completion numbers. This is an important consideration for infill areas, as they cannot solely achieve the desired outcomes due to their multiple constraints. The DPE’s Land Use Analysis for the Marrickville Precinct acknowledges the constraints presented in the area, however it is considered that planning capacity above and beyond that which has been proposed needs to be considered.

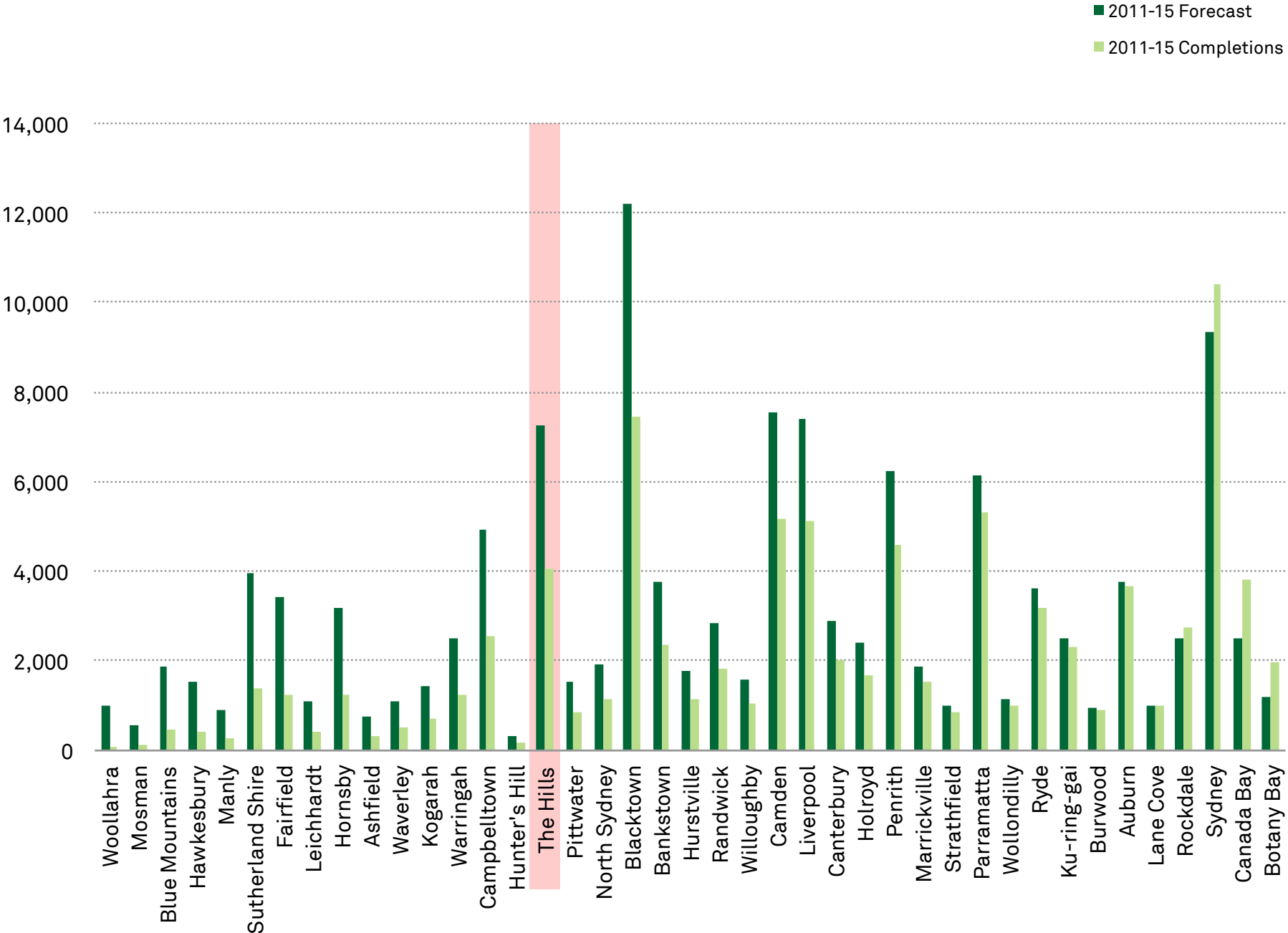


Figure 15: Housing forecasts and actual housing completions data for The Hills Shire.
Source: Mecone – with data from the Department of Planning and Environment.

4. PLANNING SUMMARY

4.1 NORTH WEST RAIL LINK CORRIDOR STRATEGY

The North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy was released by the Department of Planning and Transport NSW in 2013. The Strategy identified future visions for precincts surrounding the eight North West Rail Link stations, establishing future land uses and evaluating opportunities and challenges in each precinct.

Showground Station is recognised as being a catalyst for development of the area into a mixed use centre, providing the impetus for Castle Hill to evolve as a vibrant and active centre of offices, retail, community facilities, recreation, cultural, leisure, education and housing all within walking distance of the new station.

The subject site was identified as a Short Term Opportunity Site as there was little recent development and minimal environmental constraints. The Showground Structure Plan identified the site for medium density residential housing, envisaged as apartment buildings of 3-6 storeys.

The Department of Planning and Environment has nominated Showground Station as a Priority Growth Area and will facilitate a rezoning of the precinct.

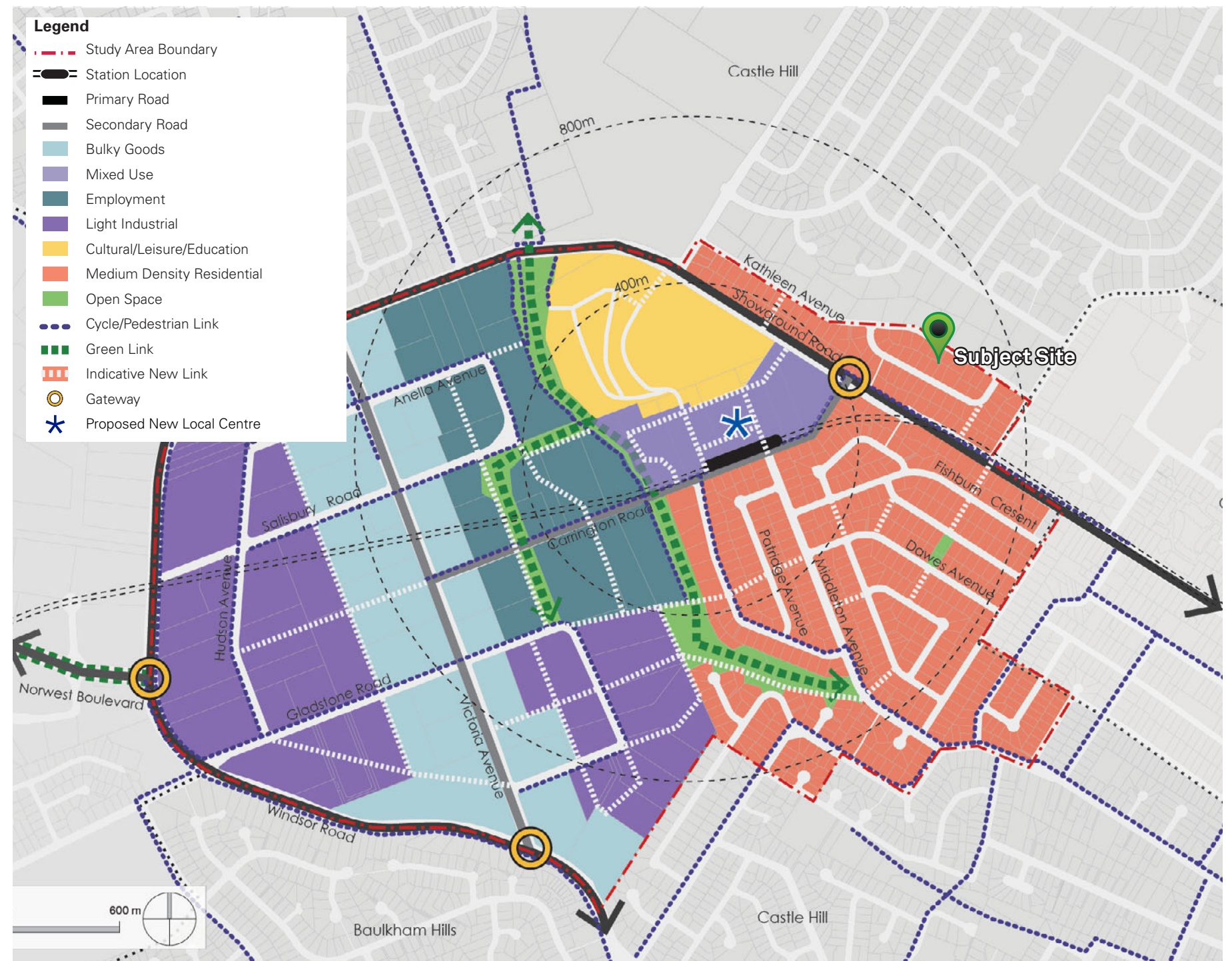


Figure 16: Showground Structure Plan – North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy.
Source: NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

4. PLANNING SUMMARY

4.2 DRAFT SHOWGROUND STATION PRECINCT PROPOSAL

The draft Showground Station Precinct Proposal was placed on exhibition in December 2015, developed with the vision to create “The Hills Cultural and Innovation Precinct”.

The draft plan has been developed following community consultation and includes proposed land use zones, maximum building heights, maximum floor space ratios, the provision of open space and pedestrian and cyclist connections, and infrastructure works.

The subject site is identified within the draft Showground Precinct Proposal at a lesser density than proposed under the North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy. Planning controls identified for the site are:

- An R3 – Medium Density Residential zoning
- A maximum height limit of 10m, equating to 2 to 3 storeys
- A minimum lot size of 240m²
- No nominated floor space ratio, with site coverage and built form controls for under a new Development Control Plan

The Department has identified that employment growth within the Precinct is important. However, a large area of employment land has been rezoned to the west of the station to residential. It is considered more appropriate to rezone this area to a B5 or B6 zone to ensure employment growth in the area, and to rezone the precinct subject to this submission to R4 – High Density Residential to accommodate dwelling capacity.

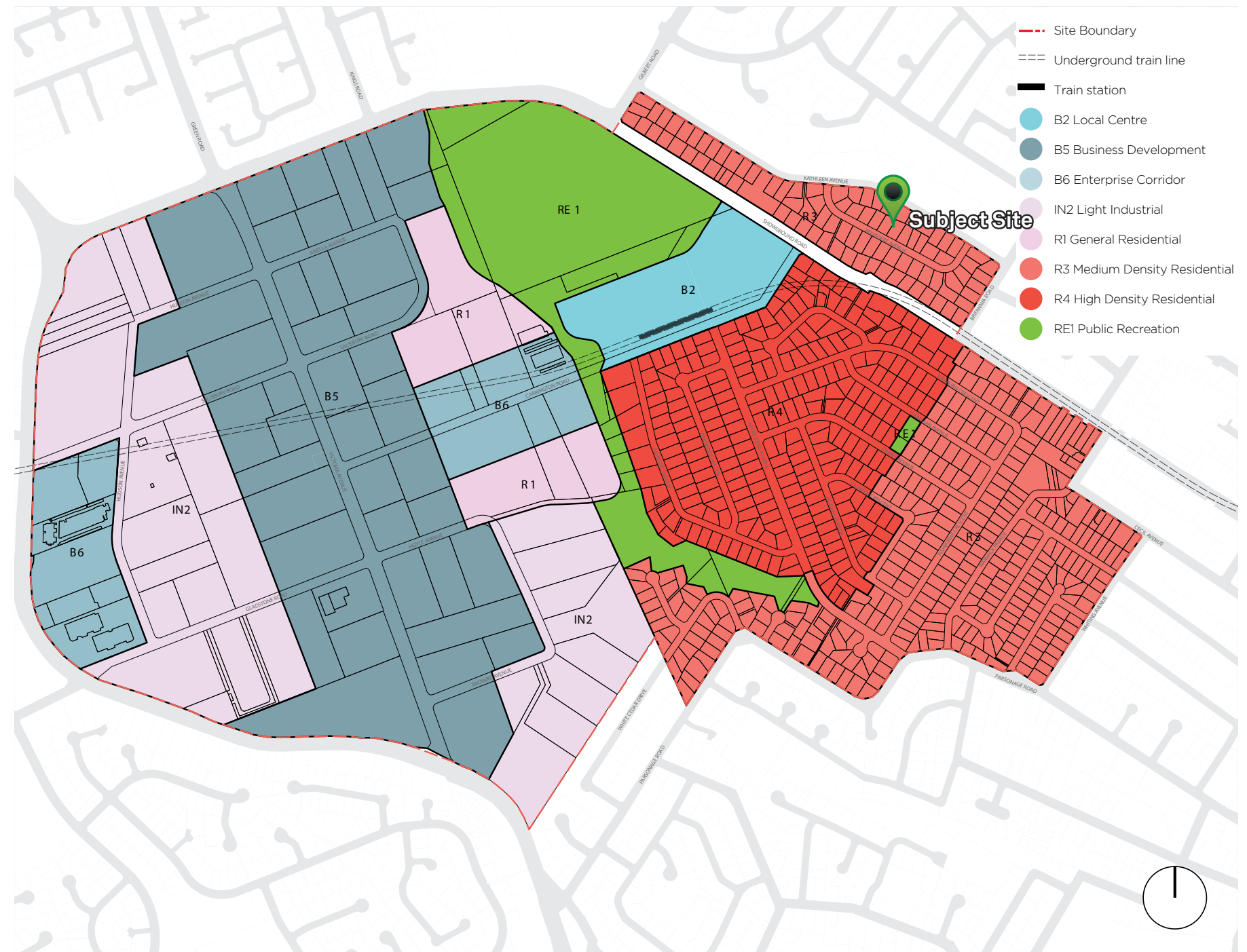


Figure 17: Showground Station Precinct Plan
Source: Department of Planning and Environment.

5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 OPPORTUNITIES

CONSOLIDATED SITE

The subject site is the joint landholding of several residents and has a total area of over 20,500m². A consolidated area of this size has multiple benefits, which include:

- Allowing for a masterplanned approach to redevelopment, ensuring 'patchwork' redevelopment in the neighbourhood is minimised;
- More easily identifying and mitigating environmental impacts such as overshadowing, traffic circulation, and stormwater management;
- Ability to provide larger communal open space areas, benefiting future residents and the surrounding community by reducing the bulk and scale of the development.

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The site presents a unique opportunity along the Sydney Metro Northwest corridor site to significantly contribute to the development of a new transit-oriented development precinct. Future residents will be able to:

- Live, work and play within their local community;
- Have direct access to jobs across the broader Sydney area in major centres including Norwest, Macquarie Park, North Sydney and the Sydney CBD.

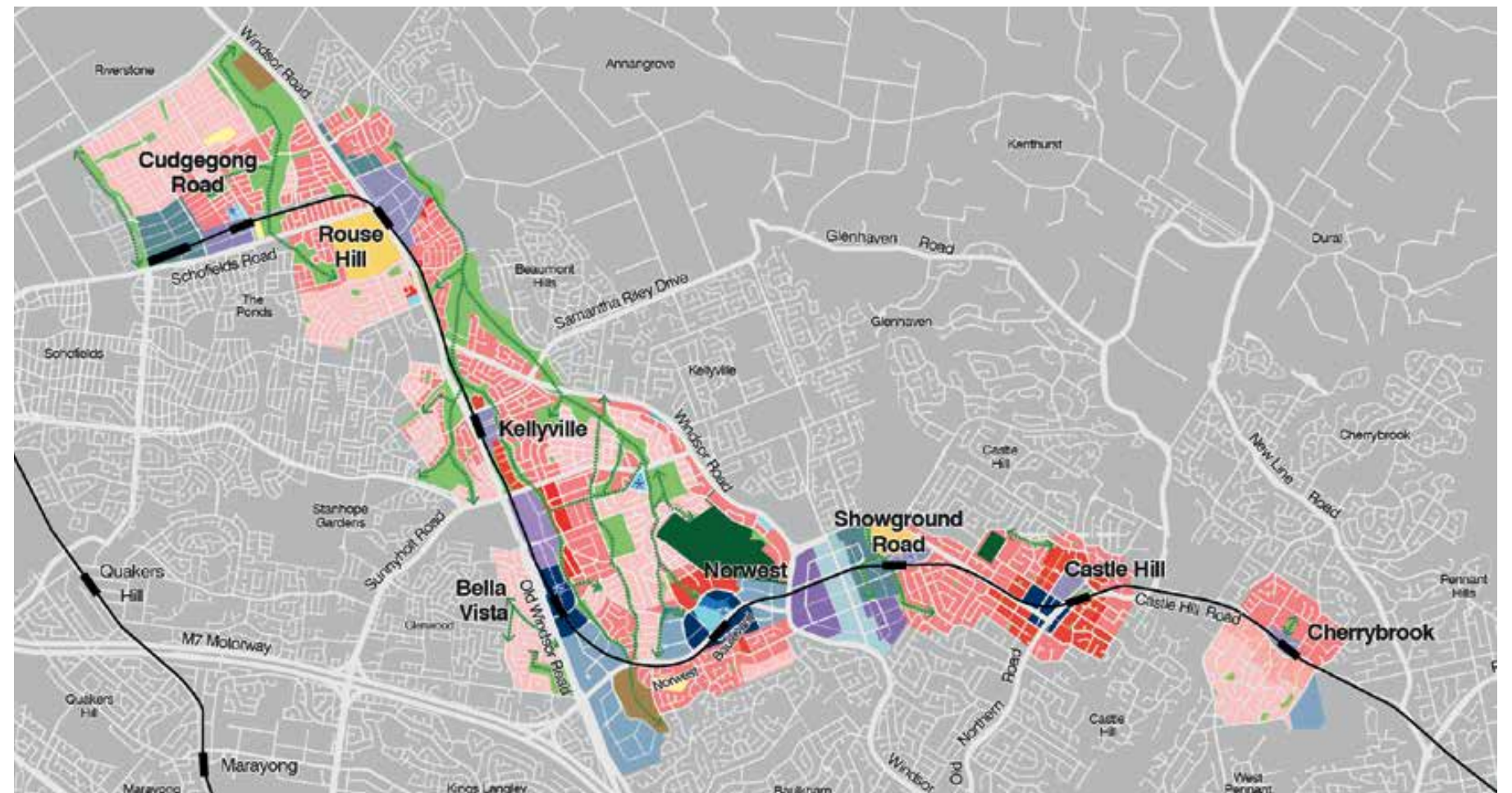


Figure 18: North West Rail Link Corridor. | **Figure 19:** An artist's impression of the future Showground Station.
Source: NSW DP&E and TfNSW.

PEDESTRIAN AND VEHICULAR ACCESS

A precinct approach to the redevelopment of the site can provide a far greater outcome with respect to traffic and pedestrian circulation. The subject site benefits from its dual frontages, which can provide multiple vehicular access points away from Showground Road. Further, with improvements to pedestrian permeability envisioned across the site, access by foot to and from Showground Station can be vastly improved for residents in this sub-precinct. New walkways through the site can link into additional pedestrian improvements in the overall precinct re-development, connecting directly to the existing pedestrian crossings on Showground Road.

Adopting a precinct wide approach to connectivity and linking new through site walkways to the existing signalised crossings will ensure that Showground Road remains penetrable, and does not act as an impediment to pedestrian flow. There are numerous examples within the Sydney metropolitan area of at grade crossings providing access to railway stations, including along the Pacific Highway in the North Shore, and along the Princes Highway in the inner south.

PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT

In conjunction with this submission, Mecone has also prepared a separate submission for another large site within the precinct, shown as “Precinct 1” in Figure 20. This demonstrates the desire of the landowners to the north of Showground Road to relocate, enabling development across this entire precinct. Mecone understands that all property owners north of Kathleen Avenue are also in support of higher density zoning, providing a significant area with the potential for immediate redevelopment in the short term. This reduces the risk of land supply not being developed. A landowner signed “Declaration of Unity” has been attached to this submission indicating the support of residents north of Showground Road for the precinct to be rezoned to R4 – High Density Residential.

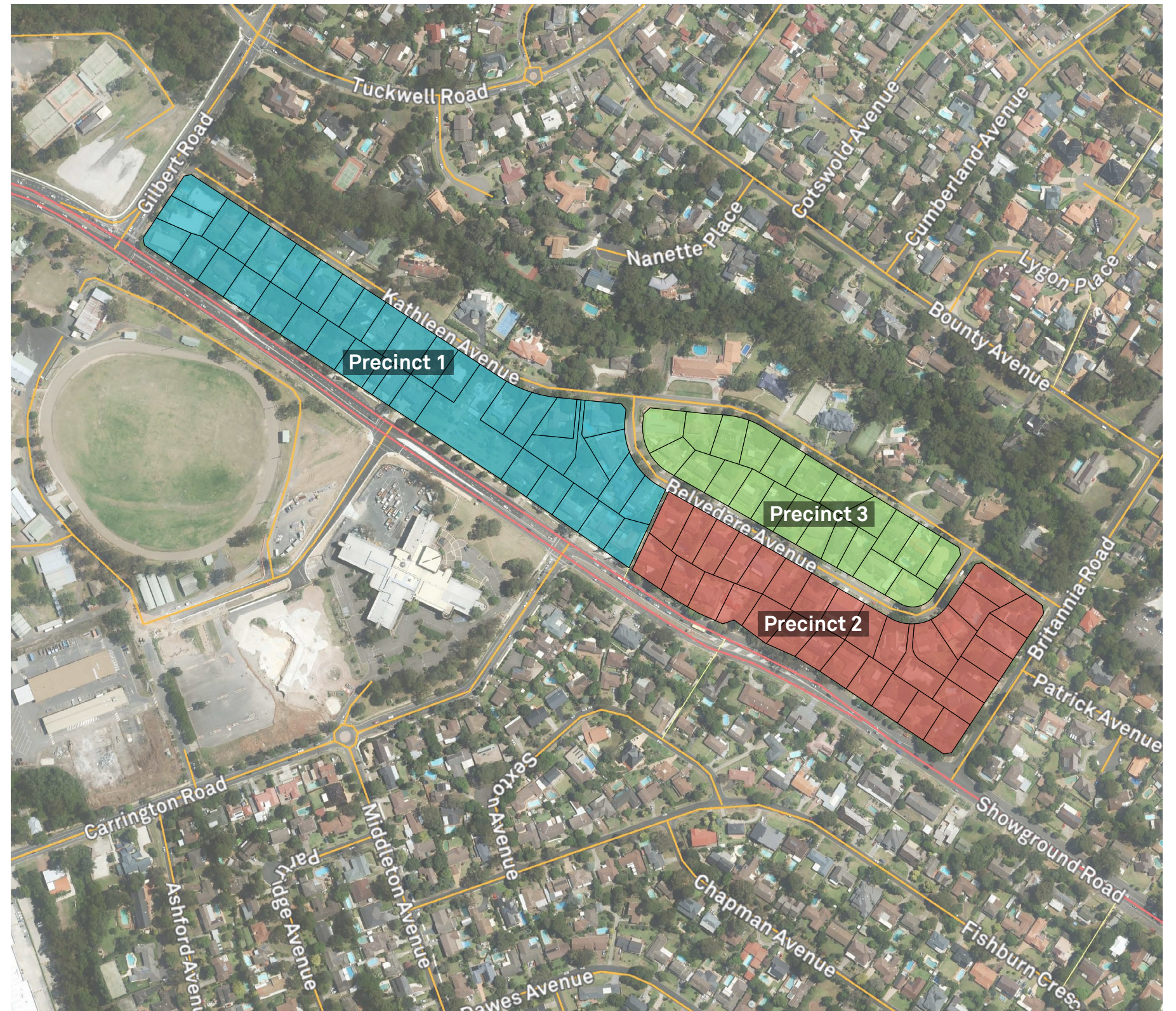


Figure 18: The three Showground Station precincts.
Source: Mecone with data from Google Maps and LPI.

5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CASTLE HILL SHOWGROUND RECREATION AREA

The precinct planning report acknowledges that there will be a proportional decrease in the per capita provision of public open space within Castle Hill, as a result of planned development. However the rate will still be at around 3.10ha per 1000 people, which exceeds the traditionally accepted rate of 2.83ha per 1000 people. The report further notes that this rate itself is considered less relevant in contemporary planning and rarely met in in-fill areas.

The Castle Hill Showground is a unique piece of infrastructure for an urban infill area, presenting a remarkable opportunity to cater for the active open space and recreation needs of the precinct's future community.

Whilst the responsibility of managing and masterplanning any development of the Castle Hill Showground remains with The Hills Shire Council, the DPE have identified some ideas to assist in the consideration of its upgrade. This includes a new stadium and sports field, new multi-purpose community facilities, a village green, a market pavilion and a children's playground.



Figure 20: Potential Improvements to Castle Hill Showground.
Source: Department of Planning and Environment.

5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

5.2 CHALLENGES

FEASIBILITY OF DEVELOPMENT

We have undertaken a basic economic feasibility analysis of the redevelopment of the land, as identified within the precinct strategy. It is evident that the density proposed would not provide the necessary uplift to make redevelopment of the site feasible. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that substantial development would occur in the station precinct. The basic feasibility is outlined below:

- The average cost for dwellings on a 900sqm lot in the area is approximately \$1.5m. With the added costs of site consolidation, the cost to a developer would be in excess of \$1.65m. This equates to \$1833 per sqm of land.
- The proposed density would allow approximately 80 dwellings across the site. Assuming an FSR for townhouse development of 0.6:1 and an efficiency rate of 95%, site costs equate to \$3055 per sqm of GFA, or \$3216 per sqm of net saleable area.
- Assuming that land costs need to remain below 30% of the total project costs to allow for a feasible development profit, townhouses would need to be sold at a sqm rate of over \$10,700.
- This rate shows that an average townhouse would need to be sold in excess of \$1.69m. This exceeds the current market price in Castle Hill for both townhouses, which sell on average for approximately \$800,000, as well as detached housing (approx. \$1.5m). This is unlikely to be attractive to prospective developers and will not result in the development uptake predicted under The Hills Corridor Strategy. Even assuming a reduced sqm sales rate, the price of a townhouse is unlikely to attract buyers if it is nearing the price of a house.

ONGOING IMPACTS

Should the ultimate rezoning of the site not present feasible redevelopment options, there will be a number of ongoing negative impacts.

Housing Affordability

To sell at a profit, a development undertaken in accordance with the density controls outlined in The Hills Corridor Strategy would need to be sold well in excess of current market expectations. This is an undesirable outcome given Sydney's existing housing affordability issues and the need for new affordable housing in accessible locations.

Reduction in Land Value

To make townhouse development on the site feasible, developers could only offer a price for land well under the existing value. This reduction in land value is unlikely to be accepted by long term residents and will lead to slow uptake of development.

Fragmented Development

With low incentive for landowners to sell or developers to purchase, redevelopment of the precinct would be slow. This would ultimately result in an inconsistent urban form and a fragmentation of development.

Public Benefits

Significant public benefits as a result of redevelopment can only be justified where there is the sufficient density to support their delivery. Townhouse and terrace development does not provide the required densities to justify the range of potential public benefits that redevelopment of the precinct could deliver.

6. VISION

6.1 THE VISION

To create a residential precinct of well designed and environmentally sustainable buildings, averaging 8–10 storeys across the site.

Redevelopment of the site as a whole will:

- Generate economic activity and population growth in The Hills LGA;
- Help create a sense of place at Showground Station by undertaking a masterplanned approach of a key site;
- Ensure any increase in height and density responds to the existing and future character of the precinct;
- Provide a high quality development within walking distance to Showground Station and local schools, shops and parks; and
- Provide a mix of dwelling types in an accessible location, assisting with the dwelling targets for The Hills LGA and allowing for ageing in place.



6.2 PRECINCT APPROACH

The master plan design aims to:

- Approach the design of the site from an urban design perspective, sensitively incorporating higher density land uses;
- Provide a mix of dwelling types and sizes;
- Sensibly step building heights towards the future town centre;
- Provide an appropriate yet feasible scale of development, to an average building height of 8–10 Storeys and a maximum Floor Space Ratio of 2.8:1;

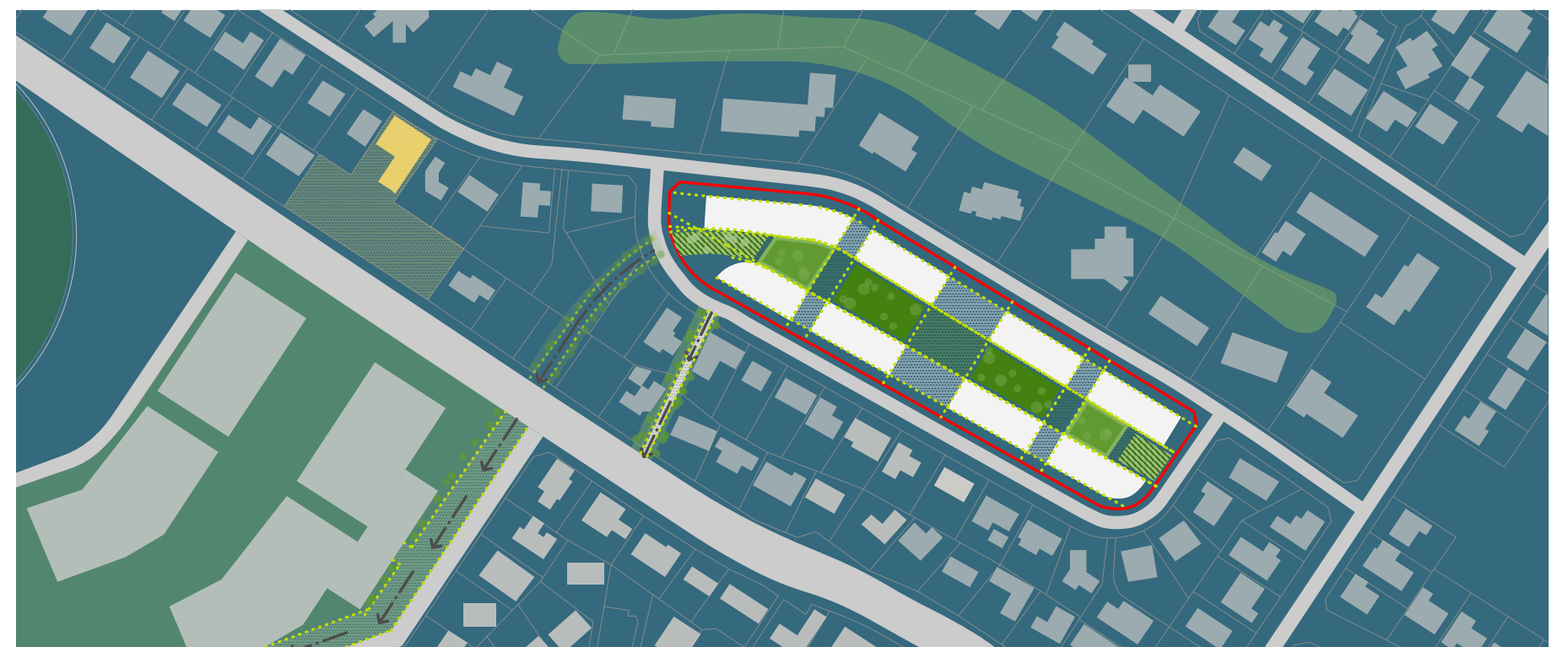


Figure 21: Precinct vision. | **Figure 22:** Wider precinct approach.
Source: Urban Possible.

6. VISION

- Incorporate architecturally designed buildings of varying height, scale, and density to ensure successful urban design outcomes; and
- Provide optimal amenity to future residents and surrounding neighbours by minimising environmental impacts such as overshadowing.

6.3 BUILT FORM

- The dimensions and topography of the site lends itself to building footprints as two linear strips fronting Kathleen and Belvedere Avenues.
- The configuration ensures active street edges and maximises north facing apartments.
- Enables the creation of a green avenue through the heart of the site, with the opportunity to further divide this space into discreet pocket parks, squares and courtyards.
- The proposed built form is able to successfully respond to the surrounding context

6.4 CONNECTIVITY AND PERMEABILITY

- Consideration has been given to providing permeability to the site but also within the wider precinct.
- The built form is configured around an ordered structure of paths and through-site links, encouraging north-south and east-west movements.
- A new link to Showground Road is proposed, consistent with The Hills Corridor Strategy. A number of access points and future connectivity to surrounding areas including to the Showground Station precinct.

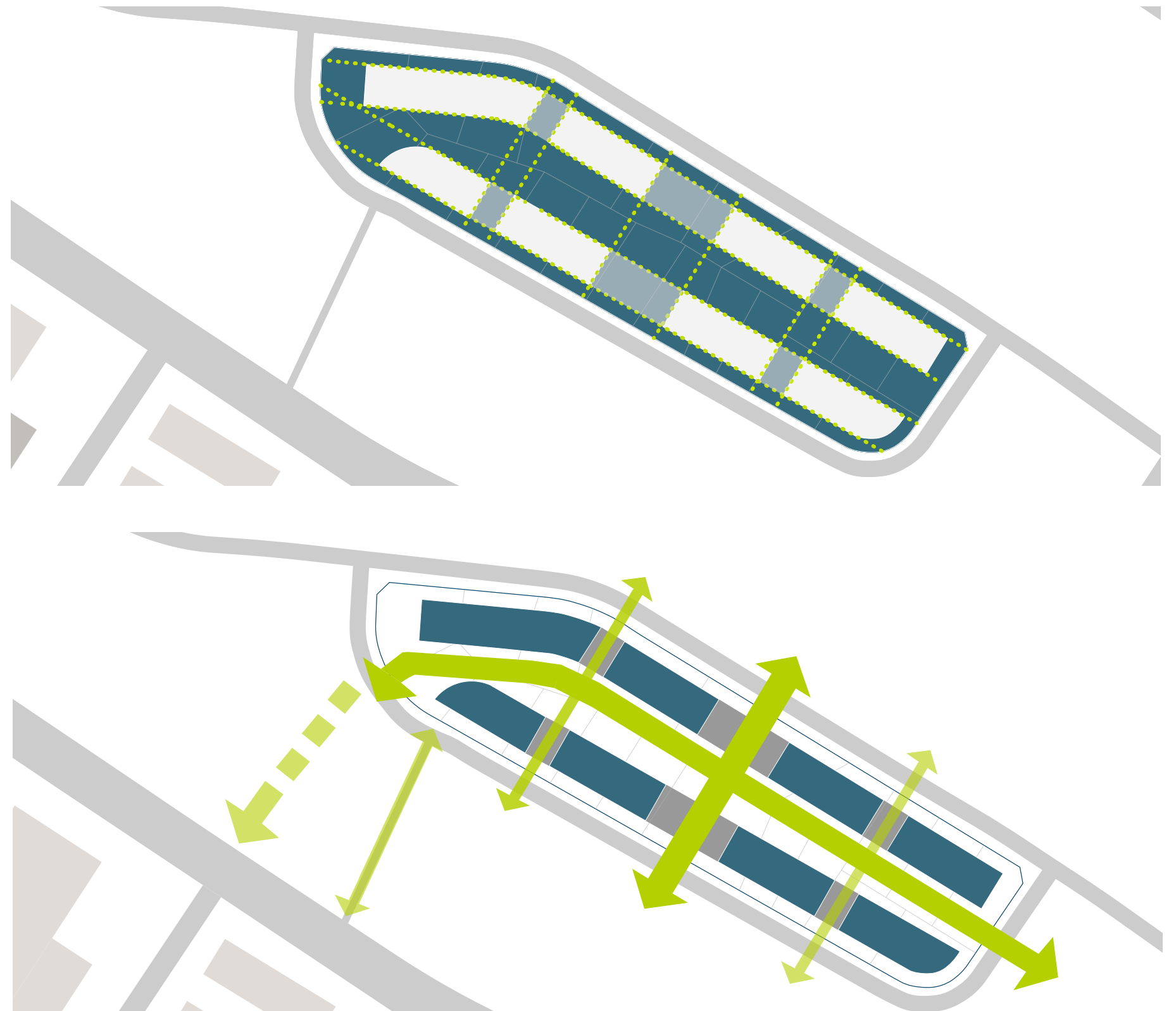


Figure 23: Built form and composition. | **Figure 24:** Connectivity and Permeability.
Source: Urban Possible.

6. VISION

6.5 INTEGRATED PLACEMAKING

- A central avenue of public and private open space sits between the buildings.
- Each space is designed with a specific function and hierarchy and includes a sunlit central square.
- Semi-public pocket parks bookend the east and west ends of the site.
- Collectively, the spaces and places encourages a broad range of uses and creates a desirable and vibrant outcome.

6.6 A GREEN SPINE

- The central avenue is not only a place for people, but also a green spine running the length of the site.
- This offers soft landscaping opportunities, providing respite and amenity for residents and the wider community.
- The Green Spine further allows for a considered environmental underpinning to the entire development site through enhanced water catchment and recycling, stormwater management and increased site biodiversity.

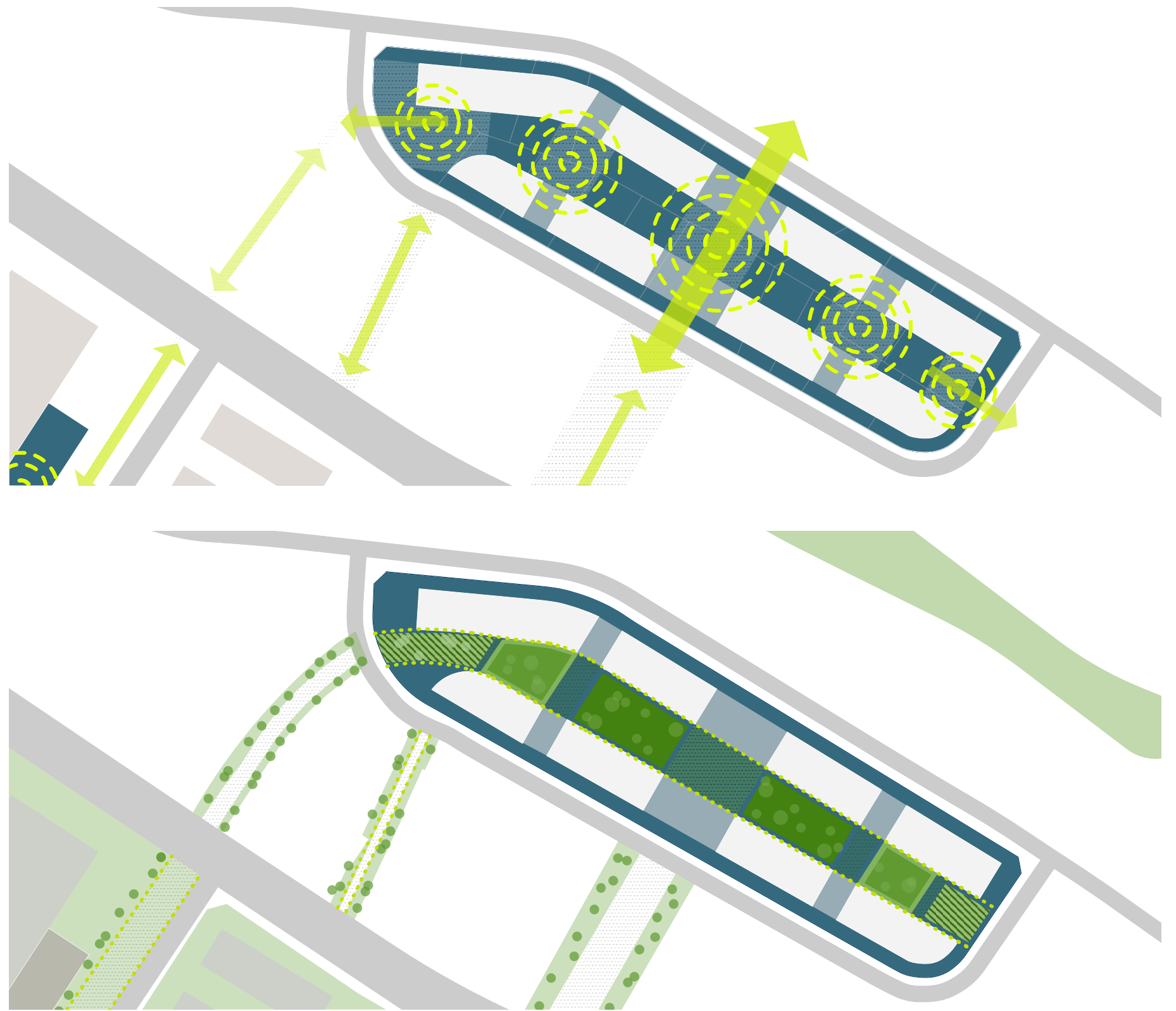


Figure 25: Integrated placemaking. | **Figure 26:** Proposed green spine.
Source: Urban Possible.

6. VISION

6.7 HEIGHT MODULATION

Modulating heights across the site has a number of benefits, including:

- Improving the contextual relationship with the lower scale dwellings on the northern side of Kathleen Avenue;
- Utilising the lower scale street wall along Kathleen Avenue to softly mark the transition to a higher density precinct extending towards Showground Station;
- Reinforcing and positively responding to the natural topography; and
- Maximising sunlight access to individual apartments and ground floor public and private open spaces.

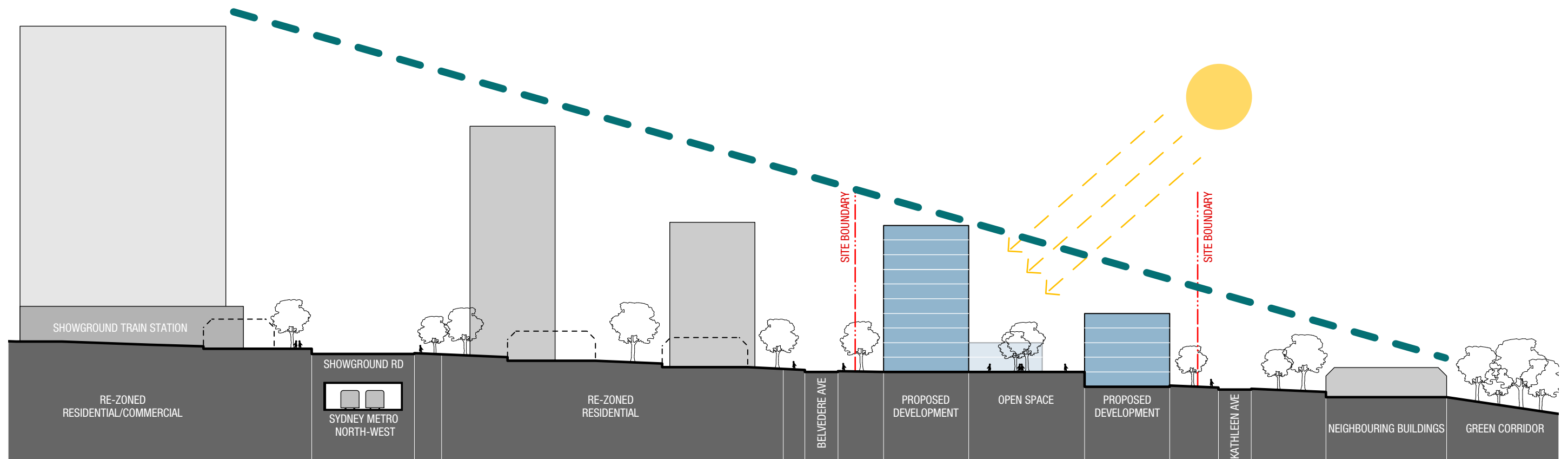


Figure 27: Modulated building heights diagram.

Source: Urban Possible.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 THE CASE IN SUMMARY

The subject site presents an opportunity for a transit-oriented development within walking distance to Showground Station, which is a part of Australia's largest public transport project, the Sydney Metro. The site has high redevelopment potential, located on an entire street block and free from any major constraints. Future residents will have access to the vast opportunities the site and local area present, as well as those opened up by the new rail corridor.

The DPEs proposal to rezone the site for townhouse and terrace development is not reflective of current market conditions, and would likely not result in any serious development being undertaken. Higher density development therefore requires consideration.

Following our review of site and market conditions, a vision for the site has been developed which optimises the built form within environmental and amenity constraints, to achieve a maximum building FSR of 2.8:1 and an average building height of 8–10 storeys. Under these controls, the site is able to achieve a density of approximately 300 dwellings per hectare, which is far more feasible. This is a desirable outcome which gives certainty to landowners and developers, and allows for an integrated approach to the development of the site.

Mecone has also prepared a submission for an adjoining site of 4ha in area, which supports and aligns with the planning principles outlined in this document. This in effect has identified an entire precinct north of Showground Road which can be immediately developed for high density residential purposes. Landowners in this precinct have signed a “Declaration of Unity” stating their preference for an R4 - High Density Residential Zoning

The site's location and size makes it ideal for higher density development. The vision for the site ensures that there will be positive urban design outcomes, improved amenity, multiple open space areas, transitioning building heights, and minimal environmental impacts.

We envision working further with the DPE towards a rezoning of the Showground Precinct, and establishing Castle Hill as an excellent example of transit-oriented development in Northwest Sydney.



Figure 28: Precedent images.
Source: Urban Possible.



