COMMUNITY RECONSTRUCTION -
THE STRENGTHENING GRANTHAM PROJECT

Jamie Simmonds, Lockyer Valley Regional Council
Cameron Davies, Deicke Richards

Introduction
Grantham is a small rural town located west of Brisbane, in the Lockyer Valley. It became the single most devastated community of the January 2011 floods in Queensland, with lives lost and homes destroyed or damaged beyond repair. In an Australian-first, the Lockyer Valley Regional Council (the Council) have given flood affected residents the option to move themselves and their assets to higher ground as part of a voluntary land-swap agreement. The planning process was fast-tracked by the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) and completed in just four months, an exercise that would normally take two to three years. This was during a period when Council resources were already stretched with flood relief efforts. The framework under which it was delivered is unique in both a statutory and physical sense. It is arguably one of the most concentrated reconstruction projects associated with the January 2011 floods.

Council’s led Strengthening Grantham Project has shown community collaboration like no other. The combined effects working under difficult and challenging circumstances as a result of an extreme natural disaster have emerged as a positive and exemplar project of contributing to a more resilient Queensland.

The following story unravels the sequence of planning steps in this recovery.

Pre-Flood
Grantham has served as a rural service centre to the dairy and fruit growing industries well established in the Lockyer Valley. Like its name sake in England, the town provided key distribution services and market activities supported by passing trade on the Gatton-Helidon Road (the old Warrego Highway). Parts of the town located south of the railway line floods frequently and as the community gradually grew, newer residential development and community facilities were located north of the rail line on higher ground. With the realignment of the Warrego Highway, the local market trade diminished and now the principle industry for the community is the local abattoir.
10th January 2011 – Flood Devastation

Flash floods occurred on the 10 of January 2011. What was described as an ‘inland tsunami’ by residents, swept through the town, devastating the much of the town. Many people tragically lost their lives, homes and businesses and much of the town was completely destroyed. The future of the once peaceful town of Grantham was radically altered and at the same time thrust into the international limelight.

The Lockyer Valley Council had just faced the most devastating natural disaster in its history affecting many other Communities and a large area. What quickly emerged was the need for significant financial and social capital to assist in its recovery.

January 2011 - Recovery

In the days following the floods, the Australian Defence Force, State Government, LVRC and Grantham residents, came to grips with the task of locating missing people, reopening roads and putting in place facilities and accommodation for displaced members of the community. The Grantham State School was used as a key meeting place and food distribution point for flood victims.

Council staff worked efficiently and tirelessly in the face of a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. In such circumstances it would have been understandable if planning issues were given a back seat to the immediate needs of shelter and core services. Council recognized that this was a truly unique event and deserved a special response.

February 2011 – A New Site Emerges

Grantham was at a fork in the road. It became very clear that a significant number of the residents wanted to rebuild in Grantham but did not want to rebuild properties that were subject to future flooding. Sinking land values and a shortage of safe housing lots limited the options for many victims and threatened to diminish the Town. Finding a planning solution that could enable existing residents to stay in their Community but in safer circumstances was a key to Grantham’s recovery.

Acting quickly, the LVRC purchased a strategic parcel of land, adjoining the existing township, that residents had fled to and which remained dry during the floods. Primarily this would enable flood victims and those living in flood effected areas to relocate to higher ground while still remaining part of Grantham.

The new development parcel covering 485 hectares also had a broader purpose to reinforce Grantham socially and economically.

- The site is large enough to accommodate the new Lockyer Valley Showgrounds in a location where it can add additional economic stimulus to Grantham.
- The site can also accommodate future growth of Grantham and additional associated community facilities for the region.
- The new location for the Showgrounds freed up an existing nearby Council owned site for the development of industry in a location where it would increase Grantham’s economic resilience.
The combination of these initiatives represents an investment of $30-40 million in developing the site over a number of years.

Incredible resourcefulness was demonstrated in the identification of this property and its strategic acquisition for the rebuilding of Grantham and a new Show Grounds. It is arguably the largest project of its type undertaken by a regional Council in responding to a natural disaster.

March - Background Analysis and Broad Planning

To meet deadlines, a tight, experienced team of designers was assembled by the LVRC to draw on all available information to paint a clear picture of the issues and opportunities relating to the site. There was not the luxury of linear constraints based planning processes. Preliminary best practice design work was progressed simultaneously with detailed reporting and investigation to inform the development of design outcomes and other studies.

Urban designers and planners, Deicke Richards, were engaged to:

- Prepare site analysis
- Provide design facilitation in master planning workshop sessions for the community
- Design a preferred master plan for the site

The northern boundary of the site is defined by the Warrego Highway and a proposed rail corridor. The Southern end of the site is defined by the existing Grantham residential community and Sandy Creek. To the west is forested land and to the east is the existing rail line and Philips Road.

The site is a cleared area used principally for non-intensive grazing. A principle ridegline runs diagonally across the site with gully lines either side feeding down to Sandy Creek and a low lying valley. A number of scattered gums were located across the site with two significant vegetation communities and their associated fauna on the western and eastern edges. Like all major sites around Grantham the site experiences flooding at its lower levels. But this site is the only parcel with flood free land that is contiguous with the existing Grantham residential settlement.

There were a number of challenges in establishing a safe flood level for the relocated community due to the 2011 flood level being significantly higher than previous events. Flood debris levels were used along with conservative margins to ensure the community had a significant increase in its flood immunity.

19th March - Visioning Session with Community

In a community visioning session, facilitated by Jude Munro, the community established and prioritized a series of initiatives to rebuild and advance the Grantham Community.

The Council fully engaged with the Community from the date of the
Senior QLD Police and LVRC officers facilitated weekly community meetings and one on one interviews with affected residents to paint a clear picture of the needs and aspirations of this community. This consultation provided the blueprint for the master plan and enabled the community to be actively involved in creating their future.

26th March - Design Options Workshop with Community

In further consultation, a design option was presented and reviewed by the community. The design option focused on two areas.

- The two year vision for Grantham - encompassing the elements of the plan that must be delivered to return the community to business as usual.
- The future master plan for Grantham - exploring the potential future of the Grantham town and community to provide growth and ongoing prosperity.

The new master plan represents significant community benefit not just in the rebuilding of Grantham after the flood but for ongoing economic prosperity for the town, underpinned by strategic planning and investment. This is achieved through:

- new markets to stimulate the centre and revive an important retailing activity for Grantham
- a new showgrounds to stimulate growth and other activities such as short term accommodation
- opportunities for further community infrastructure such as new schools.

Some of the key areas of the Masterplan are as follows:

HIGH GROUND

The ridgeline to the north-west of Grantham is developed to enable existing residents to move to higher ground. The development has a range of lot sizes reflecting the existing land parcels south of the rail line. Housing options will include smaller allotments designed for sewer.

LARGE PARK

A large park is established on Victor Street to act as a new focal space for the existing, relocated and future Grantham community. The park will cater to a range of recreational needs and may include sports clubs, skate park, picnic and BBQ facilities, walking and cycling tracks.

BUTTER FACTORY COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Butter Factory is renovated as a new community centre. The old awning is reinstated to provide a shaded outdoor area and a new car park is constructed at the side and rear.

CAMPHOR CAFÉ PRECINCT

This well-shaded street next to Sandy Creek provides the ideal setting for cafes and a nice
walk up to the Butter Factory community centre from the village centre.

FRUIT STALL CORNER

This key corner marks the entry to Grantham village and is recognised by two fruit stall inspired entry structures.

GRANTHAM VILLAGE MARKET PLACE

The heart of Grantham will be the village market place providing day-to-day commercial services for Grantham and the broader community. The shop rebuilds and expands to front the renovated park. The pub is rebuilt and plans are put in place for future temporary accommodation in the village.

On weekends the village is transformed into a significant local produce and industry market with temporary and permanent stall facilities. The old railway station site is converted to a permanent safe zone with covered shade structures that can be utilised on market days. Anzac Avenue is planted with mature trees to slow traffic as it passes through Grantham.

VICTOR STREET COMMUNITY SPINE

Victor Street has additional street trees and better footpath and cycling facilities linking key public parks, community facilities and the village centre. An additional overhead pedestrian crossing of the railway is provided to the north of the school.

The completed Grantham master plan was presented to and endorsed by the Council and then to the community.

_Master planning outcomes were conveyed succinctly and clearly to reflect the collective vision and to inspire others to contribute to the rebuilding. Comprehensive feedback of this to the community enabled them to appreciate not just the planning of their community but also the effectiveness of how it had been delivered by Lockyer Valley Regional Council and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority._

8th April – Grantham Declared Reconstruction Area

To enable the rapid planning responses necessary, the QRA declared Grantham as the first Reconstruction Area under the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Act 2011 (the QldRA Act). The declaration would enable a fast-tracked regulatory process to ensure that the ambitious program to deliver the first houses on the higher ground before Christmas would be achieved.

_The implementation program for this project was set by a promise to the see residents back in their homes by Christmas 2011. Community to rebuild Grantham by the end of this year and an imperative to serve those who needed support the most. The program of work required compressing 2-3 years of planning into less than 4 months._

April – Rotary Purchase Butter Factory for Renovation
The Rotary Club of Toowoomba came forward to purchase the old Butter Factory and drive the initiative to convert it into a Community Centre for Grantham. The transparency of the master plan to the broader community has enabled organizations like Rotary to contribute elements that will ultimately make up an integrated renewal of Grantham.

11th May – Proposed Development Scheme

The QRA through a formalised process under the QldRA Act translated the Council’s master plan into a regulatory framework in the form of the Proposed Development Scheme for the Grantham Reconstruction Area.

Given the need for the development scheme to ultimately transition back into the Council’s new Sustainable Planning Act planning scheme, the Authority prepared the development scheme using the Queensland Planning Provisions (QPP) template.

The Proposed Development Scheme outlined a strong community vision developed by Council and successfully calibrates this vision against the levels of assessment in the Land Use Plan. The Proposed Development Scheme was released for public consultation on 11 May 2011 through to 23 June 2011.

This planning process illustrates the State Government can jointly facilitate the fast and effective adoption of Council and community based master plans where there is a strategic and immediate need for change.

May – Stage 1 Design and Engineering Finalized

Cardno were engaged to provide engineering and landscape architectural services. The stage 1 work includes a new rail crossing to provide additional high ground connectivity and a safe escape route for people within the existing floodable areas. To avoid the protracted processes of tendering and engagement, but also ensure that expenditure on the project was captured within the Lockyer Valley, the Council deployed its own construction team to deliver Stage 1 of the project. The project creates up to 60 jobs in the Lockyer Valley Region.

The new Stage 1 work provides a number of key environmental benefits including:

- New sewerage package plant to service all new allotments and with capacity to sewer all existing allotments in Grantham; this would allow all existing septic systems to be removed
- Financial compensations to encourage affected residents to reuse and relocate their existing dwellings to the high ground
- Town water
- Roads and footpaths some of which have been located in such a way that enables the cost effective relocation of existing homes in the flood area up to higher ground.
- Revegetation of the existing gully lines with native vegetation reflecting the original ecosystem of the area
- Best practice stormwater management integrated with parkland elements
- National Broadband Network connectivity.
7th June 2011 – Construction Commences

Less than 5 months since the January Floods, construction started on higher ground. This was facilitated by the Authority and the Department of Local Government and Planning through the use of a temporary local planning instrument allowing earthworks to commence. The sod turning marked an historic day in the rebuilding of Grantham with construction of the first 100 new lots to be made available through a ballot land swap arrangement. Deputy Premier Paul Lucas, Lockyer Valley Mayor Cr Steve Jones and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority CEO Graeme Newton helped turn the first sod in a ceremony representing the close co-operation between State and Local Government that had enabled this new start. These first signs of construction gave residents a renewed sense of hope.

30th June – Submitted Scheme

During notification the Authority received the six submissions on the Proposed Development Scheme and documented this within a Submissions Report. Consideration of matters raised within the submissions informed amendments to the Proposed Development Scheme which under the QldRA Act is to be provided to the Premier and Minister for Reconstruction in a form known as the Submitted Scheme. The Submitted Scheme and the Submissions Report were provided to the Premier and Minister for Reconstruction on Thursday 30 June 2011.

4th August – Development Scheme

The Governor in Council approved the Queensland Reconstruction Amendment Regulation 2011 on Thursday 4 August 2011 giving effect to the Development Scheme for the Grantham Reconstruction Area.

Less than four months since the declaration of the reconstruction area the development scheme for the Grantham Reconstruction Area took effect. This period including 2 ½ months of community consultation.

6th August - Ballot Released

With the Development Scheme in effect, residents from Grantham, Murphy's Creek, Postman's Ridge, Withcott and Helidon were given the opportunity to move to higher ground under the voluntary land-swap initiative. Lots were offered under a formalised ballot system whereby participating residents nominate their first, second and third land preference.

The Authority, working closely with State Government agencies, to ensure that eligible landholders for Stage 1 of the land swap program would not be required to pay transfer duty on their lot in the estate, land searches will be provided free of charge to the Council and eligible landholders and will provide ex gratia relief for survey plan and titles registration fees for the Council and eligible landholders.
Special grants of $35,000 were also offered by the State Government to eligible landholders for Stage 1 of the land swap program to assist them with relocation costs to the higher ground.

**Future**

The project is on track for residents to start moving in during December 2011.

*The Strengthening Grantham project has engendered new hope and positive prospects in to the Lockyer Valley community. The plan will guide the town of Grantham towards the prosperity and safety that it deserves.*