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The Housing Blueprint has landed to address the dire Wimmera Southern Mallee housing shortage

Housing is considered the Wimmera Southern Mallee's (WSM) number one challenge inhibiting growth, liveability and economic strength. To address the region's dire housing shortage, the Wimmera Development Association (WDA) has launched its Housing Blueprint, delivering plans for innovative housing solutions based on seven core foundations.

In December 2020 WDA delivered a housing report highlighting the significant housing challenges facing the region.

With an apparent need to act, the report findings led to support from the Department of Jobs, Precinct and Regions for implementation of the recommendations through the Department's Regional Recovery Fund.

WDA Executive Director and Housing Taskforce Committee Member Chris Sounness said, "The lack of housing affordability, rental and social housing availability shortages, construction industry capacity and skill development deficits, and the combined impacts on economic development are very evident within the region. These challenges have been further exacerbated by COVID-19."

Chris said, "We're pleased to be launching the Blueprint, it is a valuable step forward in addressing the region's housing crisis. With WDA projecting 1.9% regional population growth over the next 15 years, there is a need for innovative housing and regional infrastructure solutions to support this growth target.

"In combination with access to community facilities, healthcare and childcare, housing was acknowledged as a critical component in attracting and retaining people in the region.

"We have seen over the past 60 years that population has increased by 8.7% while the number of houses occupied has almost doubled, with an average of 2.2 people per dwelling in 2020¹, down from 4.1 in 1961², said Chris."

"The Blueprint strategies are aimed at accommodating new migrants and the everchanging needs of residents, particularly aging community members, with a focus on 'aging in place' ensuring retiring community members are able to remain and be involved within our strong and vibrant communities.

"Housing choice and availability is a significant contributor to the liveability equation for new residents, and for businesses attracting new staff, so several integrated solutions were needed to initiate future housing diversity and at a faster rate than is currently being delivered.

The Housing Blueprint's seven core foundations have been developed with extensive regional consultation and all support the region's growth target, buoyant job projections and poised economic growth potential.

The foundations extend to supporting the enhancement of small township planning schemes and capacities to increase land availability and establishment of new partnerships as has commenced with Haven Home Safe.

There are also plans to develop a regional housing structure to build own, rent and sell affordable housing for ageing, low-income earning families, relocating staff and lifestyle migrants.

Additionally, there is a focus on supporting the region's construction capacity and skills pipelines with efforts being progressed to attract construction tradespeople and businesses to the region. The housing taskforce is also heavily supportive of the review of current construction training programs to improve delivery and availability ensuring they are regionally fit for purpose.

The success of the Blueprint opportunities and proposed deliverables involves strong stakeholder and regional collaboration with WDA a key driver of the outcome delivery.

For more information on the Wimmera Development Association's Housing Taskforce please go to the WDA website www.wda.org.au

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Photo: Mr Chris Sounness WDA Executive Director

Reported figures are as per the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Housing Review, 2020 summary document - ¹2020 figures are approximations (based on the ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing). ²The WSM region in 1961 excluded a few of the current region's towns and figures are an approximation only.

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About WDA

Wimmera Development Association is the peak economic development organisation for the Wimmera Southern Mallee region - encompassing the Horsham Rural City municipality and Hindmarsh, Northern Grampians, West Wimmera and Yarriambiack shires.

Wimmera Development Association works with the community and governments to attract new investment, further develop existing business and promote the Wimmera's sustainable development opportunities - both within and outside the region.

Wimmera Development Association is a vital link between industry and government and has a proven track record of advocating for and attracting new development to the region.

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