

What to do with buyback land?

by Maarten de Weerd

Ideas are being sought for the future use of 50 hectares of land in Lismore.

Announced in late September by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, the Lismore Precinct Plan, a partnership between the State Government and Lismore City Council, will be developed from early 2026 with a view to re-purposing 500 blocks of land across Lismore identified as being at high risk of future flooding.

The properties, voluntarily purchased by the NSW Reconstruction Authority as part of the Home Buyback Program, have been deemed no longer suitable for housing and ownership will be transferred to the council for rezoning.

The on-going demolition and relocation of dwellings has left large swathes of Lismore looking noticeably bare leading to much speculation as to how the newly vacant land could be utilised.

The Plan seeks to address the conjecture and

uncertainty in the community around the buyback land, with opportunities for planners, engineers and other experts to work on the project opening soon. Community consultation will be sought throughout 2026 across a mix of in-person and on-line forums, details of which will be announced later this year.

“Planning for the future use of this land must be carefully and sensitively managed, and the voices of the whole community – those who live, work and own businesses there – will be central to the process,” Lismore MP and Minister for Recovery, Janelle Saffin said.

While buybacks, demolitions and relocations continue across the region, the announcement highlights a shift in focus to what comes next for flood-weary Lismore.

“The Lismore Precinct Plan is a crucial milestone in the recovery of our city and our community as we build in resilience to future weather events,” Lismore Mayor Steven Krieg said.

Understandably the

announcement has been met with a mixed response. Organisations such as Reclaim Our Recovery (ROR) have voiced concerns about the process.

“It must draw from a broad section of community and in particular from local expertise and First Nations knowledge. ROR representative Miriam Torzillo said.

“It must involve community in decision-making, not just in filling in surveys and attending poorly conducted community forums, like the ones run as part of the CSIRO Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative.

“The conversations must not just be about whether a development should take place, but about vision. These community decisions will affect the cultural and social life of the community as well as the long-term resilience and emergence of this community and place,” Ms Torzillo said.

“It has to be more than a conversation about zoning and rates and infrastructure, but about the health of the



Janelle Saffin makes the announcement

natural environment that sustains us.”

Lismore does not have to look far to see how other cities have approached repurposing buy-back land and the challenges of the undertaking. North of the border, a similarly sized area has been designated for re-zoning with buy-back programs well advanced in both Brisbane and Ipswich.

Brisbane City Council has committed to turning its newly acquired land into green spaces. Whilst many

houses have been demolished, little to no development has taken place on these properties.

One of the challenges faced by the Council has been the scattered nature of sites making it difficult to develop contiguous parklands or larger recreational facilities, a challenge Lismore City Council will likely have to grapple with in its Precinct Plan.

It’s a similar story in Ipswich where Mayor Teresa Harding announced in November

2024 that land acquired under the buyback scheme would be re-zoned as non-occupied green zone. Residents were given a two-week window to make submissions via the council’s website and pop-up consultation sessions held across the city.

However, in September this year the mayor conceded that the council is reluctant to develop these sites due to the liability ratepayers would face in the event of another significant flood. Attention is now turning to creating bushland reserves on the vacant land.

Lismore’s redevelopment efforts will be focussed on the city’s CBD area with North, South and East Lismore to follow. Suggested uses for the land have included public parks, recreation facilities, food production, light industry and rainforest regeneration.

What ultimately takes shape on this land will reflect not just planning priorities, but whether the wider community is genuinely part of the conversation.

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