



# Uralla Shire Renewable Energy Action Plan

A local plan for navigating the energy transition

March 2026



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Next Economy acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and sea in the regions where we work. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and offer our solidarity and support to First Nations groups across the country working towards economic sovereignty and justice.

## About The Next Economy

The Next Economy (TNE) works with regions, government, industry and civil society leaders to build climate-safe, regenerative and socially just economies.

Find out more at: [www.nexteconomy.com.au](http://www.nexteconomy.com.au)

## Acknowledgement

We are grateful to all the individuals and organisations who have directly contributed insights to help inform the development of this report (see Appendix C) - as well as other stakeholders The Next Economy has engaged with through our regional place-based work overtime and whose activities have also informed the report findings.

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## Foreword

Uralla Shire is a place people care about deeply. Our towns and villages are built on strong community connections, a proud agricultural base and a shared respect for the land. As the New England Renewable Energy Zone develops around us, our region is entering a period of significant change.

This will offer a once in a lifetime opportunity, however how that change is managed will impact generations to come. Renewable energy brings real opportunities for our community, from new jobs and skills to investment in infrastructure and services. It also brings challenges, including pressure on housing, land use, roads, water and the natural environment.

While Council does not make all the decisions about large-scale renewable energy projects, we do have a responsibility to help our community be ready for what is coming and to make sure local voices are heard.

This Renewable Energy Action Plan is one way we are doing that. It sets out how Council will work with residents, government and industry to guide renewable energy development in a way that reflects what Uralla values. It provides a shared framework to support planning, advocacy and decision-making, so that change can be managed in a coordinated and thoughtful way rather than project by project.

The Plan has been developed through the Striking a New Deal project, in partnership with The Next Economy. Over the past year, more than 150 people across the Shire have shared their views through interviews, workshops, school sessions and surveys. Those conversations have shaped the focus areas, strategies and actions in this document, and they reflect the care people have for this place and its future.

This Plan is not about taking a position for or against individual projects. It is about being clear on what good development looks like for Uralla Shire, and how we can work together to protect what makes this Shire special while making the most of new opportunities.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed their time, ideas and experience. Your involvement gives this Plan its strength and helps ensure that as renewable energy development continues, we can help ensure it does so in a way that supports a strong, connected and resilient Uralla Shire.

### Mayor Robert Bell



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Mayor Robert Bell  
**Source:** Uralla Shire Council

## Executive Summary

**Uralla Shire is a place defined by strong connections, deep care for the land and a shared commitment to protecting what makes the region special.** As the New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) develops, people across the Shire have been clear that they want change to strengthen – rather than unsettle – the Shire’s rural character, social cohesion and local livelihoods. Although the NE REZ spans six local government areas, the Uralla Shire will be at the centre of construction activity, making early thoughtful planning essential.

**The scale of the NE REZ brings both opportunities and challenges.** The project will unlock up to 8GW of renewable energy generation – half of the NSW Government’s 2030 16GW Renewable Energy target – and storage, and attract as much as \$24 billion in private investment.<sup>1</sup> With three of the five energy hubs, alongside new transmission lines, batteries and multiple generation projects located within the Shire, 1500 temporary workers may live locally at the height of construction. This influx will place pressure on housing, water, roads, services and the natural environment, while the investment offers the chance to strengthen the local infrastructure, grow the economy and build new training pathways for young people.

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*‘With renewable energy development accelerating, the community faces real choices. This is a chance to shape not just what gets built, but what kind of future we build with it.’ – **community member***

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**In response, Uralla Shire Council partnered with The Next Economy through the Striking a New Deal (SaND) project to make sure community experience and knowledge leads the planning process.**

More than 150 residents participated in workshops, interviews, school sessions and surveys, offering honest reflections on transparent communication and early engagement. This process included careful siting of infrastructure, coordinated housing and water planning, strong biosecurity practices, fair benefit distribution and protection of farmland and biodiversity. Their insights broadly align with EnergyCo’s major infrastructure studies, which highlighted the urgent need for coordinated investment in water security, housing diversity, waste and recycling capacity, service delivery and transport routes.

*At the centre of the process was a core question: what does good economic development look like for Uralla Shire?*

**A shared vision for ‘good development’ sits at the heart of this Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP).** Community members emphasised that development must be transparent, respectful and shaped by local knowledge. The REAP reflects this by setting out practical actions across six focus areas: community cohesion; nature and agriculture; infrastructure; local economy and business; jobs, skills and training; and health and community services.

**Vision:** *Uralla Shire Council is a thriving rural Shire where the renewable energy transition has strengthened community life, supported local livelihoods, and protected the Shire’s unique identity.*

**The REAP provides a coordinated local framework to guide planning, investment and engagement as the NE REZ progresses.** Summarised in the table below, the Plan brings together clear **outcomes, strategies** and **actions** to help manage impacts and deliver lasting benefits for the Shire. The Plan clarifies community expectations, strengthens Council's advocacy, supports government and industry to align their work with local priorities and offers residents a way to track progress. It also encourages coordinated infrastructure planning, ensures impacts and benefits are managed fairly and helps avoid the project-by-project responses that can overwhelm small communities. Together these elements shift the Shire from reactive responses to strategic, place-based planning that protects community values and sets the region up for long-term success.

**Many of the REAP actions are already underway, showing the Shire's proactive response to change.** Uralla Shire Council is working closely with EnergyCo and neighbouring Councils, and in consultation with the community, progressing long-term water planning and identifying suitable land for temporary workforce accommodation. Council is also updating strategic documents to guide future land use. In another example, local biodiversity experts are sharing their knowledge to improve the ecological outcomes of projects through the Biodiversity Reference Group.

**Looking ahead, Uralla Shire Council will embed the REAP into its strategic and operational work to ensure ongoing community leadership.** This includes reflecting community priorities through the EnergyCo Steering Committee and infrastructure negotiations. Progress will be shared through regular Council reporting, and continued community engagement. As construction activity ramps up, the focus will remain on ensuring the transition strengthens community life, supports local livelihoods and protects the unique character of Uralla Shire for generations to come.

**A visual summary of Uralla Shire's Renewable Energy Action Plan:**

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Vision</h2>		
<p><b>Uralla Shire Council is a thriving rural Shire where the renewable energy transition has strengthened community life, supported local livelihoods, and protected the Shire's unique identity.</b></p>		
Focus area	Outcome	Strategy
<p><b>1. Community cohesion</b></p>	<p>United, inclusive community deeply connected to its heritage, celebrating First Nations custodianship and a strong shared identity.</p>	<p>1.1 Engage the community as a long-term partner. 1.2 Foster an inclusive community 1.3 Deliver real community benefit from REZ-related investment</p>
<p><b>2 Nature &amp; agriculture</b></p>	<p>Protected biodiversity, farmland and rural way of life, with any development shaped by care the land.</p>	<p>2.1 Protect and enhance agriculture 2.2 Protect and enhance biodiversity</p>
<p><b>3 Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>Infrastructure, including roads, housing, water and waste services support community growth and daily life, protecting affordability, safety, local character, and environmental resilience.</p>	<p>3.1 Coordinate and leverage infrastructure planning and investment 3.2 Maintain and improve housing availability and affordability 3.3 Improve water security 3.4 Manage waste and recover resources</p>
<p><b>4 Local economy, business and innovation</b></p>	<p>Diverse, locally owned and innovative economy, with thriving main-street businesses, new industries and career pathways, and an affordable cost of living and doing business.</p>	<p>4.1 Maximize local economic participation in REZ delivery 4.2 Strengthen the resilience and long-term diversity of the local economy</p>
<p><b>5 Jobs, skills and training</b></p>	<p>Stable, meaningful jobs supported by accessible local training pathways – creating opportunities for young people to stay in the community and benefit directly from renewable energy growth.</p>	<p>5.1 Develop a skilled workforce</p>
<p><b>6 Health &amp; community services</b></p>	<p>Reliable, well-resourced health, aged-care and community services that keep pace with a growing and changing population, with development actively supporting local wellbeing, safety and emergency readiness.</p>	<p>6.1 Improve access to GP and allied health services 6.2 Maintain a safe community environment</p>

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# 1. Introduction

**The Uralla Shire community is strongly connected and committed to protection of its region’s land, character and livelihoods. Residents value the rural lifestyle, creative culture and community history that define local identity, with these shared strengths guiding how people imagine the Shire’s future.**

Like many regional communities across Australia, Uralla Shire is navigating significant change as new energy infrastructure is developed, industries decarbonise and climate pressures intensify. While each region is unique, many are asking what good economic development looks like in this context.

The New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) will influence housing, roads, water, services and the rural landscape for our region. For a small community, planning ahead is essential to manage these impacts and take advantage of new opportunities.

The Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP) sets out how to do this. Developed by Uralla Shire Council in partnership with The Next Economy – through the Striking a New Deal (SaND) project – the Plan reflects the priorities of more than 150 residents and articulates what good development looks like for the

Shire. It outlines clear **outcomes, strategies** and **actions** across six focus areas, from community cohesion and nature protection to infrastructure, skills, services and the local economy.

Already, a great deal is happening. For example, the Council is working on temporary workers accommodation, critical water infrastructure and the development of recycling options to divert waste from landfill.

While Council is not the approval authority for major renewable energy projects, it plays a central role in how development is experienced locally – through planning, roads, water and waste services, community wellbeing and the coordination of benefit arrangements. The Plan strengthens Council’s ability to represent local values in discussions with government and industry and to guide economic development in support of Uralla Shire’s long-term liveability and resilience.

As the NE REZ progresses, this Plan will serve as a shared reference point to help ensure change is approached in a coordinated, transparent and community-centred way – keeping Uralla a place where people want to live, work and belong.



Community members show the outcomes of engagement.

**Source:** The Next Economy

## FAQs: Uralla Shire's Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP)

<b>What is the Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP)</b>	The Renewable Energy Action Plan (REAP) helps Uralla Shire prepare, adapt and benefit from the development of the New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ). It aligns development with community priorities and sets out outcomes, strategies and actions across six focus areas, providing a practical framework for coordinated planning and engagement.
<b>Why do we need the REAP</b>	NE REZ development is critical to provide reliable, affordable and clean electricity for the people of NSW as coal-fired power stations retire over the next 10 to 15 years. Already underway, it will affect housing, infrastructure, land use, services and the environment. The Plan ensures Uralla Shire anticipate and respond to impacts, highlight local values and advocate for decisions that support long-term community wellbeing.
<b>How was REAP developed?</b>	The Plan was developed by Uralla Shire Council and The Next Economy through extensive engagement with more than 150 residents over a year. This process – delivered through the Striking a New Deal (SaND) project – brought together a wide cross-section of the community to identify priorities and shape practical strategies and actions.
<b>How was the community involved?</b>	Engagement activities were held across the Shire in different locations and formats to reach a broad mix of residents, including First Nations people, farmers, businesses, young people, environmental groups and service organisations. Key organisations involved included RED4NE, NSW Farmers Federation, ZNet, Uralla Central School, and New England Family Support Service, alongside other community groups and individuals. This ensured the plan reflects a diversity of perspectives. A full list of the organisations engaged are captured in <b>Appendix A</b> with initial community feedback captured in the Striking a new deal for Uralla Shire available via Council's website.
<b>How can the Plan be used?</b>	The Plan guides Council's strategic and operational planning and provides a clear reference point for government, industry and the community. It supports coordinated decision-making, clearer communication and better alignment of development with local priorities.

## Snapshot: Uralla Shire Council

Uralla Shire is a picturesque region characterised by its rural landscapes, historic villages and vibrant creative community. Located in the New England tablelands, between Armidale and Tamworth in NSW, the region is home to around 6000 residents.

This small population resides in the main township of Uralla as well as an array of smaller villages dispersed across the Council area including Invergowrie, Saumarez, Arding, Bundarra, Rocky River, Kentucky, Kingstown and Wollun.

Uralla Shire's main industry is agriculture, with most of the land used for sheep and cattle breeding, wool and meat production. Tourism is also a significant driver of the local economy, attracting visitors from nearby regional centres to artisanal shops and cafes, boutique breweries and distilleries. The NE REZ will create new opportunities and bring an influx of people to the area.

The community itself is vibrant with a full calendar of festivals and events, from the whimsical Fairy Festival, the celebration of local producers through the Seasons of New England Expo, to the annual Rotary Art Show. It has an older age profile, with most residents aged 50 to 79; yet there remains a strong cohort of school-age children (5 to 19).<sup>2</sup> Several villages have retained small primary schools that feed into Uralla Central School, a kindergarten to year 12 school that supports 285 students.<sup>3</sup>

This blend of generations reflects the community's depth and continuity, and highlights the need for development that supports families, young people and older residents alike. Currently, Uralla's main street covers everyday needs such as banking, chemist, grocery and hairdressing services, with the nearby regional centre of Armidale providing access to more extensive health, education, supermarket and retail services.



Uralla Shire Council statistics <sup>4</sup>	
Item	Statistic
Geographic area	3,230 square km
Population	6047
Unemployment	1.8%
Participation rate	62.4%
Median rent per week	\$400

Uralla township has significant first nation and European history. It is known as Thunderbolt country after local bushranger Captain Thunderbolt.

**Source:** EnergyCo

## Snapshot: New England Renewable Energy Zone

The New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) will connect renewable energy generation and storage projects to the electricity network, enabling 8 gigawatts (GW) of capacity (equivalent to three Bayswater Power Stations)<sup>4</sup> and attracting up to \$24 billion dollars in private investment.<sup>5</sup>

Covering six local government areas – including Glen Innes Severn in the north through to Armidale, Uralla and Walcha shire councils, and smaller areas of Inverell and Tamworth – the zone represents one of the largest regional infrastructure opportunities in NSW.



New England Renewable Energy Zone. **Source:** EnergyCo February 2025

While Armidale and Tamworth are recognised as the major service centres for the region, Uralla Shire is expected to be the epicentre of construction. It will host three of the five energy hubs alongside substations, three batteries and solar and wind farms. This concentration of activity represents significant local economic potential but also sharpens existing capacity pressures across workforce, housing and services.

The Energy Corporation New South Wales (EnergyCo) is leading the development of network infrastructure, including new 500 and 330-kilovolt (KV) transmission lines, five energy hubs, roads, storage areas and workforce accommodation.<sup>6</sup> Construction is scheduled to begin in 2027 and will roll out in two stages: Stage 1 will deliver 2.4GW by 2032, with Stage 2 adding 3.6GW by 2034. A further 2GW may be unlocked by 2043.<sup>7</sup>

Together, these developments position the NE REZ as a transformational economic opportunity for the region – one that requires coordinated planning to ensure communities can manage construction impacts and fully benefit from the investment in essential infrastructure.

## Snapshot: The role of local government

**Local government** play a strategic role in supporting the community to prepare, adapt and benefit from the NE REZ development. As key stakeholders, they convey the community expectations to government and industry and work collaboratively to manage local impacts.

Although local government do not have the power to approve or reject major renewable energy infrastructure, they do have the authority for much of the enabling infrastructure and services, including land use planning, zoning, road services and waste services. In regional and rural areas, they often own and operate water and sewer services. As such, **Uralla Shire Council** is a critical partner in determining:

- the transport and access routes to site,
- areas appropriate for lay down and storage of construction materials,
- areas appropriate for housing required for the construction and operation of renewable projects,
- access to water and sewer services,
- waste management and disposal, and
- to negotiate and coordinate community benefit funds.

The **NSW Government** has approval authority for the NE REZ, which has been nominated as a critical state significant project. The REZ and all accompanying renewable energy generation, storage and transmission projects, will be assessed by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Environmental, social and technical elements will be considered under the Renewable Energy Planning Framework.

The **Australian Government** also has a role, including assessing impacts on threatened plants and animals under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act (1999).



Uralla Shire Council and Squadron Energy discuss proposed wind farm projects.

**Source:** The Next Economy

The following table shows the responsibilities each level of government has in relation to the NE REZ.

**A summary of national, state and local government policies and responsibilities**

<p><b>National:</b></p> <p><b>Australian Government AEMO Climate Change Authority Net Zero Economy Authority</b></p>	<p><b>State - New South Wales:</b></p> <p><b>NSW Government EnergyCo Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure</b></p>	<p><b>Local:</b></p> <p><b>Uralla Shire Council</b></p>
<p><b>Policies and Key Plans</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Net Zero Plan</li> <li>• Sector plans</li> <li>• National Climate Risk Assessment</li> <li>• Future Made In Australia</li> <li>• AEMO ISP 2026</li> <li>• NZEA Act 2024</li> <li>• EPBC Act 1999 and Regulations 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act</li> <li>• NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewable Energy Action Plan</li> <li>• Community Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Local Environment Plan</li> <li>• Growth Management Strategy</li> <li>• Local Housing Strategy</li> <li>• Uralla Shire Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsibilities</b></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set National Net Zero targets and policies</li> <li>• Plan national infrastructure</li> <li>• Assessment of environmental impact under the EPBC Act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment and approval of significant projects under the Renewable Energy Planning Framework</li> <li>• Development of transmission infrastructure and the renewable energy zones.</li> </ul>	<p>Land use planning including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning for housing/ industrial areas</li> <li>• Roads</li> <li>• Waste</li> <li>• Water and Sewer</li> <li>• Community benefit funds</li> </ul>

## 2. Uralla Shire's Renewable Energy Action Plan

**The Uralla Shire Council wants to prepare for the development of the NE REZ and ensure development contributes to the ongoing sustainability of Uralla's economy, unique character and way of life.**

The NE REZ is expected to attract up to \$24 billion in private sector investment<sup>8</sup>. This presents opportunities for infrastructure investment, industry diversification, and new jobs, but also raises critical questions regarding community cohesion, housing, land use and water demand.

This REAP will guide Council's strategic and operational planning and provides a clear reference point for government, industry and the community. It supports coordinated decision-making, clearer communication and better alignment of development with local priorities.

This section outlines the **vision** and **outcomes** the community would like to see across six **focus areas** post development. It provides the **strategies** and **actions** to deliver them.



Figure 1. The structure of the Renewable Energy Action Plan.

The structure moves from the community vision, through each of the six focus areas providing the outcome the community would like to see post development. It provides the strategies and actions the Uralla Shire Council and other key stakeholders will need to implement to deliver them.

### Vision

Community members across Uralla have shared a range of views about how they would like to see the region change over time.

While perspectives differ, many emphasised the importance of supporting the area's long-term liveability, including access to reliable services, affordable housing, a strong sense of community, and care for farmland and local biodiversity.

There was a strong interest in development that aligns with these focus areas, particularly where it builds lasting value for the whole community by strengthening community life, supporting local livelihoods, and protecting the Shire's unique character.

## Community Vision Statement

**Uralla is a thriving rural Shire where the renewable energy transition has strengthened community life, supported local livelihoods, and protected the Shire's unique identity.**

**Growth is planned with people at the centre;** housing is affordable and diverse, roads are safe and reliable, water and waste systems are resilient, and public transport connects towns and villages.

**The community is united,** inclusive, and proud of its heritage. First Nations custodianship is respected and embedded in decision-making. Newcomers are welcomed and actively involved, with events, spaces, and programs that bring people together.

**Nature and farmland are well cared for,** with renewable energy and other development designed to protect landscapes, biodiversity, and water.

**The local economy is diverse and resilient,** built on clean energy, agriculture, tourism, and creative industries, with education and training linking people to new opportunities.

Development is carefully managed so that growth enhances Uralla's character, delivers lasting local benefits, and keeps the Shire a place where people want to live, work, and belong.

## Focus Area 1: Community cohesion

The rollout of renewable energy infrastructure is bringing major change to the community's structure, identity and social connections. Uralla Shire Council and the community are focussed on managing this transition in a way that strengthens, rather than fragments, the local economy and social fabric.

### **Outcome 1: Uralla Shire is a united, inclusive community deeply connected to its heritage, celebrating First Nations custodianship and a strong shared identity.**

Although views differ on the suitability, scale and pace of the NE REZ development, the community is committed to proactive engagement with government and developers. Residents want to engage as respected partners whose local knowledge can shape project design, construction and long-term outcomes for their community. Through the development of the Plan, Council is reflecting community priorities back to government and industry and articulating what good development looks like for the Shire.

Maintaining social cohesion throughout the NE REZ rollout is a central community focus, particularly given division experienced in other communities. Many residents feel delays and unclear communication around renewable energy projects have contributed to misinformation and distrust. By creating opportunities for respectful, open discussions informed by clear, fact-based information, Uralla Shire Council is working to build community trust and increase transparency.

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*'My hope is that the town looks back and is happy it went ahead, not divided by it.'* – **community member**

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Social cohesion is also affected by the way land access agreements are negotiated. Many landholders have expressed concern about non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) that prevent neighbouring landholders from discussing commercial terms. This lack of transparency can heighten mistrust and cause friction between neighbours.

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*'NDAs should be outlawed. This would prevent so much conflict.'* – **community member**

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Balancing inclusive, transparent engagement with commercial confidentiality requirements (NDAs), remains a challenge. To support open and equitable negotiations, the NSW Farmers Federation, with support from EnergyCo, has developed the NSW Renewable Energy Transmission Landholder Guide to help landholders navigate fair and equitable access agreements.

This section outlines the **strategies** and **key actions** community organisations, Council and project partners can take to support social cohesion. These include engaging the community as a long-term partner, fostering inclusion and shaping long-term outcomes that reflect local aspirations.

### **Strategy 1.1 Engage the community as a long-term partner**

A key strategic action for achieving community cohesion is engaging the community as a long-term partner. This is centred on evidence-based timely information, and respect for landholders and local knowledge.

Actions to engage the community as a long-term partner (1.1)

Priority key	Ongoing	Now	Next	Later	
What needs to happen	Community & Partners			What Council can do	Priority
1.1.1	Improved community understanding of REZ activity in Uralla Shire and reduced misinformation.	Local media e.g. Wordsworth <i>(report verified information)</i> EnergyCo & RE Proponents <i>(project updates)</i> Universities & schools e.g. UNE <i>(independent research and public education)</i> Community advocates e.g. Community Power Agency <i>(facilitate information collation and sharing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain a dedicated REZ information page with plain-English summaries and FAQs.</li> <li>Publish quarterly REZ activity updates summarising project status and known impacts.</li> <li>Facilitate opportunities for community information sessions with relevant agencies and proponents.</li> </ul>		
1.1.2	Fair, transparent and informed engagement between proponents and landholders.	RE Proponents & industry peak bodies <i>(primary engagement with landholders)</i> NSW Farmers Federation <i>(advisory support and advocacy)</i> Community advocates e.g. NSW Water and Energy Ombudsman <i>(independent information and education)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the use of the Renewable Energy and Transmission Landholder guide</li> <li>Share 'best practice' examples (e.g. landholder collectives) with industry and potential host landholder</li> </ul>		
1.1.4	Ensure local knowledge informs REZ-related planning and delivery	Community members & local organisations e.g. Southern New England Landcare <i>(local knowledge and lived experience)</i> EnergyCo & proponents <i>(project design and delivery decisions)</i> State agencies <i>(statutory approvals and oversight)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate opportunities for local knowledge holders to participate in REZ coordination forums</li> <li>Document key themes emerging from community discussions and share with relevant agencies and proponents.</li> </ul>		
1.1.5	Reflect community priorities and concerns to government and industry	Community members <i>(provide input and local insight)</i> State agencies and industry <i>(decision-makers)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Track recurring local concerns and raise them in REZ coordination forums e.g. CoREM</li> <li>Report back to the community on how local input has been represented.</li> </ul>		

## Strategy 1.2 Foster an inclusive community

Uralla Shire Council has a small population of 6,047, with 1.8 per cent unemployment and a growing number of people in retirement. As such, workers from outside the region will be needed to meet workforce requirements to construct the renewable energy generation, storage, batteries and transmission associated with the NE REZ.

*'The influx of workers will change the nature of the community, unless there is an ability to integrate those folks into community life.'*

**– community member**

It is anticipated 2,919 temporary workers are needed at the peak of construction in 2030.<sup>9</sup> This could increase the population of Uralla Shire by 48 per cent, changing the diversity and nature of the community. The community want to be proactive in welcoming workers to their community, sharing their values and engaging them in community life.

### Actions to foster an inclusive community (1.2)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
1.2.1	Support the integration of temporary workers and new residents into community life.	<p>Employers and project developers (<i>workforce management and induction</i>)</p> <p>Local sporting clubs and community groups e.g. Uralla Tigers (<i>social connection and participation</i>)</p> <p>Chamber of Commerce / local businesses (<i>informal integration and daily interaction</i>)</p> <p>Volunteer and service organisations e.g. Rotary (<i>community events and support</i>)</p> <p>Schools and training providers (<i>education and youth engagement</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with employers and community groups to share information about local events, services and clubs.</li> <li>• Support community-led Welcome Program initiatives and social activities.</li> <li>• Promote pathways for new residents to connect with local organisations and events.</li> </ul>	
1.2.2	Promote respectful behaviour and manage social impacts associated with REZ activity.	<p>Employers and project developers (<i>workforce management and induction</i>)</p> <p>Workforce accommodation providers (<i>on-site management</i>)</p> <p>NSW Police (<i>law enforcement</i>)</p> <p>Local pubs &amp; clubs (<i>responsible service environments</i>)</p> <p>Community members (<i>reporting concerns and modelling respectful behaviour</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote clear expectations of respectful conduct for workers and contractors operating in the Shire.</li> <li>• Clarify referral pathways and responsibilities for responding to antisocial behaviour.</li> <li>• Raise emerging social concerns through REZ coordination forums where relevant.</li> </ul>	

### Case study: Helping new workers become part of the community



RDA Northern Inland NSW staff support the Welcome Experience.

**Source:** RDA Northern Inland

As Uralla attracts more essential workers and project staff through the REZ, how people are welcomed will shape whether they stay, contribute and settle into the community.

The NSW Government's Welcome Experience, delivered locally by Regional Development Australia Northern Inland, supports people who have recently moved or are considering moving to Uralla, Armidale and Tamworth. It provides practical help with housing, schools, healthcare, jobs for partners and connections to local clubs and community groups. In its first month, more than 40 people across the three LGAs were already being supported.

Programs like this reduce the risk that incoming workers remain disconnected or place extra strain on services. By linking newcomers into schools, sport, volunteering and local business early, Uralla can turn workforce growth from the REZ into longer-term community strength rather than short-term disruption.

### Strategy 1.3 Deliver real community benefit from REZ-related investment

To help offset the impacts of the NE REZ, EnergyCo has created a community and employment benefit program to support community-led projects, separate from landholder and neighbour payments made directly to property owners. Uralla Shire Council can also negotiate voluntary planning agreements with developers to secure funding for local initiatives.

The community is interested in pooling contributions from individual projects so investment can be directed toward long-term legacy outcomes that reflect local aspirations, rather than dispersed across one-off activities. Establishing open and transparent governance will build confidence in how funding decisions are made and ensure benefits are delivered in a fair and trusted way.

#### Actions to deliver real community benefit from REZ-related investment. (1.3)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
1.3.1	Transparent and trusted governance of community benefit arrangements.	EnergyCo ( <i>benefit program administration</i> )  RE proponents ( <i>VPA and negotiated contributions</i> )  NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure ( <i>statutory framework oversight</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish and maintain clear governance arrangements for community benefit funding.</li> <li>Clearly communicate funding criteria and decision-making processes.</li> <li>Report publicly on benefit allocation and outcomes.</li> </ul>	

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
1.3.2	Community benefit initiatives are financially and operationally sustainable.	<p>EnergyCo (<i>program funding parameters</i>)</p> <p>RE proponents (<i>negotiated contributions</i>)</p> <p>Community Benefit Advisory Committee (<i>assessment and recommendations</i>)</p> <p>Service providers and Community organisations (<i>project delivery and ongoing management</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop financial and operational sustainability criteria for assessing proposals.</li> <li>• Consider lifecycle costs and ongoing maintenance obligations.</li> <li>• Avoid projects that create unfunded long-term liabilities.</li> </ul>	
1.3.3	Investment delivers meaningful, long-term benefit aligned with community priorities.	<p>Community Benefit Advisory Committee (<i>advice and prioritisation</i>)</p> <p>Neighbouring councils &amp; Regional bodies (<i>strategic alignment and co-funding opportunities</i>)</p> <p>Community organisations (<i>project proposals and delivery</i>)</p> <p>EnergyCo (<i>program funding streams</i>)</p> <p>RE proponents (<i>VPA and in-kind contributions</i>)</p> <p>NSW Government e.g. Treasury (<i>co-investment opportunities</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify priority investment themes aligned with adopted strategies.</li> <li>• Seek opportunities to leverage benefit contributions toward catalytic or co-funded projects.</li> <li>• Consider both financial and in-kind contributions from Renewable Energy projects that deliver enduring value</li> </ul>	

## Focus Area 2: Protecting agriculture and biodiversity

As Uralla Shire navigates the development of the NE REZ land use and biodiversity have emerged as central concerns. How development is managed will shape both ecological health and the agricultural economy.

**Outcome 2: Uralla Shire Council is protecting its biodiversity, farmland, and rural way of life - with any development shaped by care for the land.**

### Strategy 2.1 Protect and enhance agriculture

Agriculture is central to both the economy and identity of the New England region. The Northern Tablelands is widely recognised for its superfine merino and high-quality beef cattle, with generations of farming families managing mixed farms across the Uralla Shire Council. As the region plans for change, it is critical to support agricultural livelihoods to remain viable, alongside other emerging land uses.

Farmers in the council area expressed mixed views about hosting renewable energy infrastructure, some see it as an opportunity to diversify and/or gain a reliable income, others are concerned productive farmland will be lost and/or the visual amenity of the rural landscape will be marred. The Uralla Shire Council can provide formal comments to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) on the site, design and impact of renewable energy infrastructure projects through the Environmental Impact Statement planning process. However, the Council prefer to engage with developers early so community priorities are reflected in the design and development of the project.



New England is recognised for its superfine Merino and famous woolsheds, like, Deeargee Station.  
**Source:** Bush Journal

Many practical concerns were raised about the impact of the construction phase on agricultural production, with significant numbers of truck movements impacting the condition of roads and blocking major highways carrying stock to market. Already, Council has provided feedback on transport routes, recommending alternatives to avoid local assets such as the avenue and bridge approaching Gostwyck Church.

With construction workers and machinery moving from property to property there are significant biosecurity risks. These, together with pest management issues, can be addressed through management practices that support good neighbour relationships between projects and landholders. These actions are outlined in the table below.

## 2.1 Actions to protect and enhance agriculture

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>2.1.1</b> Renewable energy infrastructure is sited and designed to minimise impact on productive farmland and rural landscape character.</p>	<p>DPHI (<i>statutory approvals</i>)</p> <p>RE proponents (<i>site selection and design</i>)</p> <p>EnergyCo (<i>coordination</i>)</p> <p>Host landholders (<i>local agricultural knowledge</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide formal submissions on land capability, cumulative impact and landscape considerations.</li> <li>• Advocate for avoidance or mitigation of impacts on high-value productive land where feasible.</li> <li>• Identify and protect locally significant agricultural areas and landscape features.</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: #2e7d72; color: white; text-align: center;">High</p>
<p><b>2.1.2</b> REZ development does not add to local weed or feral animal problems and, where possible, contributes to broader pest control efforts.</p>	<p>RE proponents (<i>project-level pest and biosecurity management</i>)</p> <p>Local Land Services (<i>regional expertise and program delivery</i>)</p> <p>Landholders/ farmers (<i>property-level management and local knowledge</i>)</p> <p>New England Regional Councils (<i>regional coordination</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support weed and pest management plans for REZ developments that reflect local biosecurity priorities</li> <li>• Work with proponents and Local Land Services to coordinate weed and feral animal control activities.</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for REZ-related on-ground environmental management to contribute to regional pest control programs</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: #c8e6c9; text-align: center;">Medium</p>
<p><b>2.1.3</b> Construction traffic does not disrupt farm operations or rural access.</p>	<p>RE proponents (<i>construction logistics and funding of upgrades</i>)</p> <p>Transport for NSW (<i>state road approvals and OSOM access</i>)</p> <p>EnergyCo (<i>regional coordination</i>)</p> <p>Landholders (<i>property access and seasonal movements</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input into preferred haulage routes and traffic management plans to protect agricultural movements and sensitive local assets.</li> <li>• Raise seasonal access issues.</li> <li>• Monitor impacts on rural road condition.</li> <li>• Advocate for strategic upgrades to rural roads and remediation where required.</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: #2e7d72; color: white; text-align: center;">High</p>

## Case Studies: Local initiatives safeguarding land, water and agricultural livelihoods

### *Balala landholders working together*



Farmers in Balala are working together to engage with developers and share their priorities.

**Source:** Cr Sarah Burrows

In the Balala area of Uralla Shire, neighbouring landholders formed a group to engage collectively with EnergyCo and a proposed wind farm developer, rather than negotiating one-by-one. By sharing information and using joint legal advice, they agreed on common priorities for how projects should be planned across their properties.

The landholder group includes farmers, some of whom are also council representatives and Rural Fire Service volunteers. All are hosts, or potential hosts, of infrastructure, and all are concerned about impacts on land, water, roads and the landscape. Working as a collective has allowed them to raise issues early, suggest alternative layouts, and push for clearer commitments on construction and environmental monitoring. It has also assisted with ensuring EnergyCo infrastructure is better placed for both the landholders and ease of construction. They say it has helped keep the community connected and reduced the risk of projects creating long-term division.

### *Investing in Uralla's fine wool future*



ACEN and Sports Shearing teams at Uralla Show.

**Source:** ACEN

In early 2025, renewable energy developer ACEN Australia provided \$65,000 to sponsor a new portable shearing facility at the Uralla Showgrounds. The modular yards will support training and competition for shearers and wool handlers and can be transported for use in other towns across the region.

Fine wool production is a cornerstone of the local economy, and this facility gives local and regional producers a permanent training resource. It also strengthens connections between agriculture, education and community events, with TAFE NSW and Australian Wool Innovation Limited welcoming the expanded capacity. By investing in a practical, locally relevant facility rather than one-off giveaways, this initiative shows how renewable energy investment can support skills development beyond construction, build regional capability and help sustain industries that are part of Uralla's identity.

## Strategy 2.2 Protect and enhance biodiversity

There is strong community support for aligning climate and biodiversity goals, alongside concern that ecological risks are often understated when multiple projects proceed without coordinated oversight. There are calls for stronger safeguards and better recognition of local ecological knowledge.

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*'We want to see that, at the end of this renewable energy rollout, the environment is in a better place than before.'* – **community member**

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During engagement, community members were keen to share on-ground biodiversity insights to guide project siting, offset planning and long-term monitoring. With expertise from the University of New England, local ecological consultants and an active landcare network, the region has substantial knowledge to help avoid unnecessary tree clearing, habitat loss and disruption of wildlife corridors. The Biodiversity Reference Group – convened by the Community Power Agency and the University of New England – provides a forum for these experts to collaborate and share information with EnergyCo.

Many community members also highlighted opportunities to enhance native vegetation and wildlife corridors through strategic use of biodiversity offsets. The New England Landcare network is prepared to help coordinate landholder involvement, but there is concern that the NSW Government's new process for managing offsets under strategic offset delivery agreements may not fully engage local networks. Involving these groups will help identify landholders willing to undertake conservation work and protect local species and ecological communities.

Four core actions have been identified to protect and enhance the natural environment; these are outlined in the table below.

Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity (2.2)

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>2.2.1</b> Renewable Energy Zone projects are planned and coordinated so that important habitat and wildlife corridors are not broken up across the landscape.</p>	<p>DCCEEW (<i>biodiversity policy oversight and offset obligation</i>)</p> <p>EnergyCo (<i>regional coordination</i>)</p> <p>RE proponents (<i>site design and offset obligations</i>)</p> <p>NE REZ Biodiversity Reference Group (<i>local ecological expertise</i>)</p> <p>DPHI (<i>statutory approval and offset framework</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for regional or bioregional approaches to biodiversity planning</li> <li>Advocate for avoidance of high-value habitat and wildlife corridors</li> </ul>	
<p><b>2.2.2</b> Local landholder experience and local ecological expertise inform REZ planning, biodiversity offset design, and ongoing monitoring.</p>	<p>NE REZ Biodiversity Reference Group (<i>local ecological expertise</i>)</p> <p>Universities and research organisations (<i>research and monitoring</i>)</p> <p>Local ecological consultants (<i>technical expertise</i>)</p> <p>New England Landcare Network (<i>landholder coordination and expertise</i>)</p> <p>Anaiwan cultural knowledge holders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support information-sharing between proponents and local ecological experts (e.g. NE REZ Biodiversity Reference Group).</li> <li>Encourage early engagement with local knowledge holders in project planning.</li> <li>Strengthen Council's access to locally held ecological information to inform our own policies and practices, and our EIS submissions.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>2.2.3</b> Biodiversity offset investment supports lasting improvements to local habitat and ecological connectivity.</p>	<p>DCCEEW (<i>biodiversity policy oversight and offset obligations</i>)</p> <p>EnergyCo (<i>regional coordination</i>)</p> <p>Biodiversity Reference Group (<i>local ecological expertise</i>)</p> <p>Universities and research organisations (<i>research and monitoring</i>)</p> <p>Local ecological consultants (<i>technical expertise</i>)</p> <p>New England Landcare Network (<i>landholder coordination and expertise</i>)</p> <p>Anaiwan cultural knowledge holders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for biodiversity offsets that deliver measurable local ecological benefit.</li> <li>Support the identification of biodiversity offset sites within Uralla Shire.</li> <li>Seek alignment between offset investment and regional biodiversity priorities.</li> </ul>	

## Case Study: Local ecological knowledge as an asset for project planning



Balala Brushgrove Landcare Group conduct landholders walk.

**Source:** Southern New England Landcare (SNEL)

Across Uralla and the wider Southern New England region, many landholders and community groups have spent decades restoring farmland and bushland, protecting waterways and rebuilding wildlife corridors. This has created deep local knowledge about how landscapes function and how land use can support or undermine biodiversity.

One example is Southern New England Landcare, a long-standing community network spanning Walcha, Armidale, Uralla and the high elevation portions of Tamworth local government areas. For more than 34 years, its members have led work on vegetation, soil and water management in areas now affected by renewable energy proposals.

As projects have emerged, Landcare members have been approached by neighbours and developers for advice on koalas, microbats, water flows and habitat connectivity. Bringing this local knowledge into earlier, better resourced and more participatory planning would lead to stronger, more nature positive outcomes.

## Focus Area 3: Infrastructure

To meet the requirements of the NE REZ, investment is needed across housing, water security, road upgrades, waste management and telecommunications. With coordinated planning, these investments can deliver long-term benefits for the community.

EnergyCo commissioned five major infrastructure studies covering workforce accommodation, water and wastewater, waste and circular economy, as well as local supply chains and training and skills. Released in December 2025, these studies assess the infrastructure needs for the development and operation of the NE REZ against the region's current capacity. The findings reinforce community views that existing infrastructure and essential services do not have the capacity to support the scale of development associated with the NE REZ. And that any investment in local infrastructure must be designed to meet the short-term needs of developers and the long-term needs of the Uralla Shire.

Uralla Shire Council is already working closely with EnergyCo and the five other NE REZ councils to identify and address infrastructure constraints. Council is also developing a long-term Growth Management Strategy to guide future land use.

### ***Outcome 3: Infrastructure, including roads, housing, water and waste services, support community growth and daily life, protecting affordability, safety, local character, and environmental resilience.***

This section outlines additional requirements for housing, water, waste management and telecommunications, and shows how early, coordinated planning can address existing constraints and deliver lasting benefits – beginning with the essential strategy of aligning infrastructure planning across stakeholders.

#### **Strategy 3.1 Coordinate and leverage infrastructure planning and investment**

Effective coordination across government, industry and service providers will ensure infrastructure upgrades are planned in the right locations and sequenced at the right time. This avoids duplication, manages cumulative impacts and creates the foundations for long-term community benefit.



Coordinating infrastructure upgrades and development can provide lasting benefits for community, such as new transport routes and improved roads.

**Source:** Uralla Shire Council

## Actions to Coordinate and leverage infrastructure planning and investment (3.1)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
3.1.1	<p>Enabling infrastructure (water, wastewater, roads, waste) is delivered in advance of or in parallel with peak construction.</p>	<p>EnergyCo (<i>regional REZ coordination and infrastructure interface</i>)</p> <p>Transport for NSW (TfNSW) (<i>state road approvals and OSOM access</i>)</p> <p>Neighbouring councils (<i>cross-boundary infrastructure planning</i>)</p> <p>Regulators e.g. NHVR, EPA (<i>statutory approvals and compliance oversight</i>)</p> <p>RE Proponents (<i>project-driven infrastructure demand and funding</i>)</p> <p>DCCEEW (<i>water, environmental and biodiversity policy oversight</i>)</p> <p>WaterNSW (<i>bulk water planning and approvals</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate actively in coordination forums and identify gaps in responsibility or sequencing.</li> <li>• Convene relevant parties where coordination gaps are identified.</li> <li>• Clarify access arrangements for key local road corridors and, where appropriate, assume ownership.</li> <li>• Identify and raise risks where infrastructure delivery lags development approvals or construction timelines</li> <li>• Identify the cost to Council of necessary infrastructure upgrades and advocate for these to be offset.</li> <li>• Share information on infrastructure capacity constraints and forward works programs.</li> </ul>	
3.1.2	<p>REZ-related infrastructure investment leaves the region better serviced than before construction began.</p>	<p>EnergyCo (<i>REZ infrastructure coordination and funding interface</i>)</p> <p>TfNSW (<i>state transport network planning and upgrades</i>)</p> <p>Neighbouring councils (<i>regional alignment and shared-use opportunities</i>)</p> <p>RE Proponents (<i>capital investment and upgrade delivery</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put forward clear priority projects (e.g. road upgrades, servicing capacity, housing-enabling infrastructure)</li> <li>• Seek to align REZ-triggered upgrades with adopted Council strategies and infrastructure plans to avoid one-off or stranded investments.</li> <li>• Facilitate and support shared-use, co-investment or transitional design approaches (where feasible).</li> <li>• Participate in regional negotiations to secure funding for enabling water infrastructure.</li> </ul>	

### Strategy 3.2 Maintain and improve housing availability and affordability

The NE REZ presents an opportunity to address the current shortfall in mixed housing options across the Shire, while meeting the accommodation needs of a growing workforce.

The Workforce accommodation study anticipates increased demand as renewable energy construction and operation reshape population and workforce patterns. Temporary workforce accommodation will be required for between 1500 to 3000 workers at the peak of construction, and an estimated 240 additional homes will be needed for ongoing roles.<sup>10</sup> (REMPPLAN, 2024)

The community has expressed strong concern about the lack of capacity to absorb incoming workers. Housing supply is already tight, with limited diversity in dwelling types contributing to affordability pressures. Rental increases experienced during Stage 1 of the New England Solar Farm could continue if housing needs are not proactively planned for as part of the NE REZ.

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*'Where is the temporary workforce going to live? Housing availability [is low], rental prices [are] increasing, additional people will place a strain on the existing housing stock.'* – **community member**

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Council has completed a Local Housing Strategy 2025-2045 to address this issue and is working with developers to determine new accommodation options that reflect the heritage character of the area while addressing current capacity constraints and delivering legacy benefits.

#### Case studies: Maintaining and improving housing in the region

##### *Local modular home builder allows for quick and versatile construction*



Temporary workers accommodation could provide more mixed housing options for residents.

**Source:** Uniplan Website

One practical way to reduce pressure on housing during construction is to use high quality modular buildings that can be installed quickly and with less disruption than conventional builds.

Uniplan Group is an Australian owned modular builder based in Armidale. They market a 'Made for your farm' range aimed at worker accommodation, built off site and able to be on site in under three months, including options like cabins and motel style units.

For regions facing short, sharp workforce spikes, models like this can help create additional rooms quickly. The key question for councils and proponents would then be what happens next: whether units can be retained locally and converted into longer term housing or community uses, depending on design, approvals, and the commercial arrangements.

The Uralla Shire Council has conducted a Local Housing Strategy to identify long term housing needs and how temporary workers accommodation could address the shortfall in mixed housing options.

## Actions to maintain and improve housing availability and affordability (3.2)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
3.2.1	Sufficient zoned and serviced land is available to support long-term housing growth	<p>Private landowners / developers (<i>land release and housing delivery</i>)</p> <p>Local builders and construction firms (<i>delivery capacity</i>)</p> <p>NSW Government e.g. DPHI (<i>funding programs and planning frameworks</i>)</p> <p>Essential Energy (<i>servicing capacity and approvals</i>)</p> <p>Financial institutions / investors (<i>development feasibility and finance</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Local Housing Strategy and (forthcoming) Growth Management Strategy</li> <li>• Develop forward capital works program to determine required infrastructure servicing capacity</li> <li>• Advocate for appropriate headworks funding mechanisms.</li> <li>• Develop and apply Developer Servicing Plans.</li> </ul>	
3.2.2	Temporary workforce accommodation is delivered in line with construction demand and does not displace local housing supply	<p>EnergyCo (<i>regional coordination of workforce demand</i>)</p> <p>RE Proponents (<i>construction workforce planning and funding</i>)</p> <p>Accommodation providers (<i>supply and operation</i>)</p> <p>Landowners (<i>potential sites</i>)</p> <p>Neighbouring councils (<i>spillover workforce accommodation</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify preferred workforce camp locations aligned with long-term growth areas.</li> <li>• Work with EnergyCo and proponents to coordinate shared accommodation delivery.</li> <li>• Connect potential accommodation providers with private landholders of preferred sites.</li> <li>• Ensure temporary accommodation proposals consider legacy reuse where feasible.</li> </ul>	
	Existing housing and accommodation stock is used efficiently, and innovative housing models are embraced	<p>Property owners (hotels, caravan parks, vacant dwellings) (<i>underutilised stock</i>)</p> <p>Community housing providers (<i>affordable housing delivery</i>)</p> <p>Developers / social impact investors (<i>innovative models</i>)</p> <p>Local community organisations (<i>identify local need and partnerships</i>)</p> <p>Other regional councils &amp; networks e.g. Rural Housing Alliance (<i>shared learning on innovative approaches</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify underutilised accommodation and facilitate connections between owners and potential investors.</li> <li>• Explore innovative housing delivery models suitable for small regional markets - identify what's worked in other places and could be adapted for Uralla.</li> </ul>	

### *First Nations housing in Uralla*

In Uralla, MOYCH is an Aboriginal community housing organisation that has been operating since the late 1980s. Run entirely by local volunteers, it is one of the few Aboriginal organisations in the region registered to hold and manage housing on behalf of Aboriginal families.

MOYCH is currently developing 11 new seniors' homes and planning further family housing in response to rising rents that are pushing local Aboriginal families out of town. It is also working in partnership with the Anaiwan Aboriginal Corporation to strengthen governance and plan for the next ten years.

Local leaders say stable, community-owned housing is essential if Uralla is to retain families, support Elders and ensure local people can benefit from future development rather than being displaced by it.

### Strategy 3.3 Improve water security

Water security is a foundational issue for the Shire. Recent drought conditions demonstrated the vulnerability of the Kentucky Creek and Gwydir River supply schemes, with potable water required to be trucked into Uralla during the 2017–2019 drought. Council currently supplies approximately 5 ML/day of potable water to Uralla and Bundarra. This system has limited resilience under sustained peak demand or prolonged dry conditions.

Council is preparing an Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy (IWCM) to address existing supply and wastewater system constraints and to identify long-term, resilient solutions for both towns. This work responds to known system vulnerabilities and is required regardless of REZ development.



Water security is essential for communities, agriculture and new development.

**Source:** Uralla Shire Council

The New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) introduces a further layer of cumulative demand during the construction phase. EnergyCo's Water and Wastewater Security Study indicates that construction-related water demand — largely driven by concrete production and associated civil works — could increase demand in the Uralla LGA by up to 379% at the projected 2030 peak (approximately 27–28 ML/day).

#### Water demand for NE REZ construction

Year	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033
ML/d	0.4	1.7	19.9	27.8	26.5	12.1	10.3

**Uralla LGA Summary of change in annual water demand (potable and non-potable) between the base case and NE REZ development case, by year (ML/d)<sup>11</sup>**

While this demand is temporary in duration, it is intense in magnitude. Without careful sequencing and enabling infrastructure, peak construction demand risks exceeding both supply and treatment capacity, with implications for households, agriculture and essential services.

Improving water security in the context of the REZ therefore requires alignment between project staging and infrastructure delivery, alongside continued regional collaboration to identify and fund sustainable, long-term solutions.

Water security is both a community priority in its own right and a critical enabling condition for REZ delivery.

Actions to improve water security (3.3)

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>3.3.1</b> Water supply and sewerage treatment capacity are sufficient to meet cumulative REZ construction demand without compromising households, agriculture, essential services or nature.</p>	<p>EnergyCo (regional demand modelling and staging coordination)</p> <p>RE proponents (project-level water demand and batching logistics)</p> <p>NSW Government / DPHI (infrastructure funding and sequencing oversight)</p> <p>Regional councils (shared supply planning where relevant)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly articulate drought vulnerability, local supply and treatment capacity limits in REZ coordination forums and submissions.</li> <li>Seek transparent, project-level water demand profiles, including peak timing and batching assumptions.</li> <li>Advocate for supply upgrades or alternative sourcing arrangements to be in place ahead of peak construction demand.</li> </ul>	<p>High</p>
<p><b>3.3.2</b> Construction water use is planned and staged to reflect local system constraints.</p>	<p>RE Proponents (water sourcing and batching decisions)</p> <p>EnergyCo (regional coordination)</p> <p>DPHI (conditions of development consent)</p> <p>DCCEEW/ Water NSW (capacity support and planning)</p> <p>NSW Natural Resources Access Regulator (regulatory oversight)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage proponents to confirm concrete volumes, batching methods and water quality requirements early in project design.</li> <li>Advocate for the use of less water intensive designs (e.g. wind turbine footings), non-potable and/or alternative water sources where feasible and safe.</li> <li>Raise risks where project staging assumptions do not align with known system constraints.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium</p>

### Strategy 3.4 Manage waste and recover resources

Construction activity associated with the NE REZ is expected to generate significant volumes of waste, including spoil, packaging, steel, concrete, timber and other construction materials. EnergyCo's Waste Management and Circular Economy Study confirms that construction waste will increase markedly during peak activity periods and that existing landfill capacity across the region is limited.

Several local landfills are nearing or exceeding their licensed capacity. Without coordinated planning, increased waste volumes risk accelerating landfill exhaustion, increasing transport distances for disposal, and placing additional financial and regulatory pressure on councils.

At the same time, the scale of projected construction waste presents an opportunity to embed circular economy principles from the outset. With appropriate planning, large volumes of construction materials can be diverted from landfill through reuse, recycling and recovery. New or expanded material recovery facilities will likely be required, along with clearly identified pathways for managing non-recyclable waste.

Council is working with regional partners and universities to explore resource recovery and circular economy options, alongside investigating longer-term landfill solutions where required. Managing waste in the context of the REZ means ensuring sufficient disposal pathways exist, maximising recovery opportunities, and clarifying responsibilities early.

#### Actions to manage waste and recover resources (3.4)

What needs to happen		Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
3.4.1	Construction waste volumes are coordinated regionally to avoid overwhelming local landfill capacity	<p>EnergyCo (regional coordination and aggregation of project waste forecasts)</p> <p>RE Proponents (project-level waste generation and logistics decisions)</p> <p>Regional Councils (landfill operators and capacity managers)</p> <p>NSW EPA (licensing and compliance oversight)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly communicate local landfill capacity limits in REZ coordination forums.</li> <li>Seek transparent project-level waste forecasts, including peak construction volumes and disposal pathways.</li> <li>Participate in regional coordination of waste logistics to avoid unmanaged cumulative impacts.</li> </ul>	
3.4.2	Appropriate resource recovery and disposal infrastructure is identified and planned ahead of peak construction activity.	<p>Regional Councils (waste planning and infrastructure investment)</p> <p>Resource Recovery Operators (delivery of material recovery facilities)</p> <p>NSW EPA (approvals and licensing)</p> <p>Universities (technical modelling and circular economy research)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore opportunities for new or expanded material recovery facilities in partnership with regional councils and universities.</li> <li>Investigate long-term landfill options, including repurposing suitable former sites, subject to feasibility.</li> <li>Align REZ waste planning with adopted regional waste strategies.</li> </ul>	

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority	
		<p>Peak industry bodies (e.g. Circular PV Alliance, product stewardship schemes) (end-of-life system design and recycling pathways)</p> <p>NSW Government (capital funding pathways)</p>		
<p><b>3.4.3</b></p>	<p>Construction waste is managed in line with clear recovery, recycling and site rehabilitation obligations.</p>	<p>RE Proponents (implementation and contractor oversight)</p> <p>DPHI (conditions of approval and compliance settings)</p> <p>NSW EPA (regulatory enforcement)</p> <p>Regional Councils (local waste system interface)</p> <p>Peak industry bodies / stewardship schemes (recycling standards and product pathways)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek robust waste management and recycling requirements in project approvals.</li> <li>• Encourage proponents to prioritise reuse and recycling of construction materials where feasible.</li> <li>• Monitor and raise concerns where site clean-up and disposal obligations are unclear.</li> </ul>	

### Strategy 3.5 Improve access to affordable energy and telecommunications

While substantial investment is planned for transmission infrastructure to support the NE REZ, complementary investment in local energy distribution can unlock new commercial and industrial opportunities for the Shire.

The transition also presents an opportunity to improve telecommunications infrastructure. Reliable connectivity is essential for construction activities and for the ongoing monitoring and operation of wind and solar farms.

#### Actions to improve access to affordable energy and telecommunications (3.5)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
3.5.1	Local energy distribution capacity supports new housing, industry and community facilities.	<p>Essential Energy (distribution network planning and upgrades)</p> <p>Large energy users / industry (demand drivers and co-investment potential)</p> <p>RE proponents (embedded generation and local supply opportunities)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share growth forecasts and strategic land use plans with network providers.</li> <li>Advocate for capacity upgrades aligned with planned housing and employment land.</li> <li>Explore opportunities for local energy initiatives (e.g. embedded networks, community energy) where feasible.</li> </ul>	High
3.5.2	Mobile and broadband coverage supports construction activity, business growth and community resilience.	<p>Telecommunications providers (network rollout and upgrades)</p> <p>NBN Co (fixed broadband infrastructure)</p> <p>NSW Government / Commonwealth (blackspot funding programs)</p> <p>RE proponents (connectivity infrastructure)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with proponents to ensure temporary construction connectivity can support broader community benefit where feasible.</li> </ul>	Medium

## Focus Area 4: Local economy, business and innovation

The community is enthusiastic about the economic opportunities the NE REZ will bring to the local economy, business and innovation.

EnergyCo's local supply chain study identified potential opportunities across construction services, plant and equipment, cement and concrete materials, road aggregates, steel fabrication, warehousing and storage, transportation, catering, cleaning and hospitality<sup>12</sup>.

While many of these industries are expected to be serviced through Armidale and Tamworth, Uralla Shire will be the hub for workforce accommodation. This means the bulk of catering, cleaning and hospitality services will be required locally. Local businesses have expressed strong interest in tendering for this work but will need support to scale and meet procurement requirements.<sup>13</sup>

The community is also keen to capture the economic benefits associated with the influx of workers. Council's 'buy local' initiative, where participating stores accept 'Uralla Bucks', is seen as an effective way to support local spending. Some community members would like to see developers provide 'Uralla Bucks' to workers to encourage them to shop locally.



Buy local with Uralla Bucks.  
**Source:** The Next Economy

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*'We want companies and workers to buy locally as much as possible; we want workers to shop at Foodworks and drink at the local pubs.'*  
– **community member**

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At the same time, the community has expressed concern about a potential boom-and-bust cycle. Many fear that commercial rent increases during construction could push out local businesses or repeat the fly-in fly-out patterns seen in mining regions.

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*'There is no reason why Uralla Shire has to repeat the FIFO mistakes of the mining boom.'* – **community member**

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Overall, residents want to maintain the unique character of the local economy, with its strong base of independent, family-owned businesses.

**Outcome 4. Diverse, locally owned and innovative economy, with thriving main-street businesses, new industries and career pathways, and an affordable cost of living and doing business.**

The following sections outline actions to support local procurement and strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of Uralla’s local businesses.

**Strategy 4.1 Maximise local economic participation in REZ delivery**

The NE REZ presents significant opportunities for Uralla Shire businesses. To ensure benefits flow locally, businesses need early visibility of procurement pipelines, accessible pathways to engage with contractors, and practical support to participate. Maximising local economic participation will help translate construction activity into tangible benefits for the Shire.

Actions to maximise local economic participation in REZ delivery (4.1)

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
4.1.1 Local businesses have early visibility of REZ procurement pipelines.	RE Proponents (project-level procurement schedules)  Tier 1 Contractors (forward work packages and subcontracting timelines)  Local Business Networks / Chamber (information dissemination to members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the New England Skills and Workforce Working Group</li> <li>Request and share forward procurement information from proponents where available.</li> <li>Support local procurement briefings</li> </ul>	
4.1.2 Procurement processes and support pathways enable local businesses to participate in REZ supply chains.	Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIRD)/ Regional Development Australia (RDA) (business advisory and capability programs)  RE Proponents and Tier 1 Contractors (work packaging and supplier selection)  Industry Capability Network (ICN) (supplier matching and capability registers)  Local Businesses (tender participation and compliance readiness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect local businesses with Industry Capability Network and relevant state business advisory services.</li> <li>Facilitate introductions between local suppliers and major contractors.</li> </ul>	
4.1.3 REZ workforce spending supports local businesses.	Workforce Accommodation Providers (on-site services and worker engagement)  RE Proponents (workforce policies and incentives)  Local Retailers and Hospitality Operators (service delivery)  Business Networks (collective promotion initiatives)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote voluntary initiatives that encourage local spending (e.g. participation in Uralla Bucks).</li> <li>Work with workforce accommodation providers to connect workers with local businesses.</li> <li>Support campaigns that highlight local retail and hospitality offerings during peak construction periods.</li> </ul>	



The community are keen to support a thriving local economy.  
**Source:** Uralla Shire Council

**Strategy 4.2 Strengthen the resilience and long-term diversity of the local economy** To capture the full economic benefits of the NE REZ, local businesses need the capability and confidence to scale in line with construction demand. Other regions such as the Central West Orana have demonstrated that innovative business models can enable scaling without overextending – for example, tyre fitters establishing mobile fleet-service workshops rather than expanding fixed premises.

To scale sustainably and avoid boom-and-bust effects, businesses need strong commercial foundations, including a clear understanding of their value proposition and the risks associated with growth. RDA Northern Inland, for example, provides business support services that help develop capable, resilient and adaptable local businesses.

The following actions aim to strengthen local business competitiveness and prepare the Shire for long-term economic success.

Actions to Strengthen the resilience and long-term diversity of the local economy (4.2)

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
4.2.1	Local businesses scale flexibly during construction without overextending or creating long-term vulnerability.	RDA Northern Inland / DPIRD (small business programs)  Local Business Networks / Chamber (peer support and intelligence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide timely and accurate pre-lodgement advice on proposals for use and development</li> <li>• Connect businesses with financial, legal and advisory services.</li> <li>• Share information about projected construction timelines to support realistic business planning.</li> </ul>	

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
4.2.2	<p>REZ-related commercial growth strengthens rather than distorts the long-term stability of the local economy.</p>	<p>Commercial property owners and real estate agents (rental market influence)</p> <p>RE proponents (office siting and workforce models)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor commercial vacancy and rental pressures.</li> <li>• Ensure planning controls provide appropriate commercial and light industrial capacity.</li> <li>• Encourage co-location of RE offices, and/or location in areas that do not compete with main street trading</li> <li>• Advocate Accommodation and Employment Strategies (AES) that support local participation, without white-anting existing business (e.g. training school-leavers) as part of the EIS process</li> </ul>	

## Focus Area 5: Jobs, skills and training

The NE REZ development creates a significant opportunity to invest in training pathways that encourage more school leavers and younger residents to stay in the region.

Uralla Shire has a small population with a growing number of retirees. A large proportion of working-aged people have left the region to pursue careers elsewhere. There is a strong cohort of 15 to 19-year-olds who could be encouraged to remain in the area by engaging them in trades and roles linked to renewable energy development, supported by effective school-to-work pathways.<sup>14</sup>

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*'While the industry is booming and money is flowing, there's a real opportunity to invest in local kids – not just the apprentices companies need today, but a future workforce. If they're already training their own, why not widen the net? That's how you win hearts and leave something behind.'* – **community member**

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**Outcome: Stable, meaningful jobs supported by accessible local training pathways – creating opportunities for young people to stay in the community and benefit directly from renewable energy growth.**

### Strategy 5.1 Develop a skilled workforce



Training facilities in the region will provide opportunities for local young people.

**Source:** Simon Scott, Backtrack

EnergyCo's Training and skills study highlighted the region's existing strength in education and training. Multiple TAFE campuses and training providers support the development of the NE REZ, with Armidale TAFE focusing on construction and carpentry, and Tamworth TAFE offering specialist electrical training. Council is also aware of Essential Energy's plans to establish a training academy in Tamworth.

These training pathways offer substantial opportunities for local young people. However, community members identified several systemic barriers that limit participation in training and work. Lack of transport, driver licences and access to a vehicle can make training and employment difficult to access. Culturally appropriate mentoring programs such as those delivered by Steven Ahoy and Backtrack (see the case study, below) demonstrate the significant outcomes possible when young people are supported to build skills and gain accreditation.

The New England REZ workforce and skills group, coordinated by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), is bringing together industry, government and training organisations to improve local employment and training outcomes. Actions proposed by the community and Uralla Shire Council for consideration by the workforce and skills group and other core organisations are outlined in the table below.

## Actions to develop a skilled workforce (5.1)

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>5.1.1</b> Workforce development is coordinated across industry, training providers and government.</p>	<p>DPIRD (REZ Workforce &amp; Skills Group) (regional coordination and industry interface)</p> <p>EnergyCo / RE proponents (workforce forecasts and training needs)</p> <p>TAFE NSW &amp; training providers (course delivery and accreditation)</p> <p>Local schools (school-to-work transition pathways)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in and contribute local intelligence to the New England REZ Workforce and Skills Group.</li> <li>Share projected workforce demand information with local schools and training providers.</li> <li>Advocate for alignment between REZ construction schedules and regional training delivery.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5.1.2</b> Young people have accessible pathways from school to accredited training and apprenticeships. (white cards &amp; first aid, computer skills through to apprenticeships)</p>	<p>Local secondary schools (career guidance and VET pathways)</p> <p>TAFE NSW / RTOs (delivery of accredited training)</p> <p>Essential Energy / RE proponents (apprenticeships and traineeships)</p> <p>Group Training Organisations (apprenticeship management and placements)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate connections between local schools, training providers and RE proponents.</li> <li>Promote apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities linked to REZ delivery, including within Council.</li> <li>Support local careers events and industry exposure programs.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5.1.3</b> Job readiness and foundation skills support are available to those who need them.</p>	<p>TAFE NSW (foundation skills programs)</p> <p>Employment services providers (job readiness and mentoring)</p> <p>Community organisations (localised support delivery)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect local job seekers with relevant employment and mentoring services.</li> <li>Support partnerships with organisations delivering culturally appropriate mentoring programs.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>5.1.4</b> Practical barriers to training and employment (e.g. transport, licences) are reduced.</p>	<p>Developers / major contractors (site access requirements and scheduling)</p> <p>Employment services providers (licence and transport assistance programs)</p> <p>Transport providers / community transport services (access to training locations)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore opportunities to align community transport services with training needs.</li> <li>Incorporate employment access considerations into broader community planning.</li> </ul>	

	What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
5.1.5	First Nations training and employment pathways are culturally appropriate and locally led.	<p>Local First Nations leaders and organisations (community leadership and cultural guidance)</p> <p>RE proponents / EnergyCo (employment targets and program design)</p> <p>Mentoring organisations (e.g. BackTrack-style programs) (supported pathways)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local First Nations leaders in workforce planning discussions.</li> <li>Encourage RE proponents to work with locally trusted mentoring organisations.</li> </ul>	

## Case studies: Locals leading skilled workforce growth

### *Cultural heritage, jobs and training through local leadership: Steven Ahoy*



Taking a break from learning new fencing skills.

**Source:** Backtrack

In Uralla and across the surrounding region, local Aboriginal cultural heritage practitioners are working on the ground as renewable energy projects take shape. Steven Ahoy, a local Anaiwan man, carries out cultural heritage assessments for multiple solar, wind and transmission projects and manages a heritage maintenance crew at an operating solar farm. He has also helped set up an Aboriginal work crew that employs both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Through this work, local people are being trained in site management, monitoring and heritage protection, while also linking into university biodiversity research and school based cultural education. Steven points to the heavy reliance on FIFO labour during construction, despite strong local interest from people in Uralla, Armidale and surrounding towns.

Earlier engagement, local recruitment and clear training pathways could turn renewable energy projects into long-term jobs in heritage management, land care and cultural tourism, rather than short-term construction work that leaves little behind

### *Keeping young people connected in New England: BackTrack*

Across the Northern Tablelands, BackTrack works with young people who are dealing with school disengagement, housing instability, trauma and contact with the justice system. Based in Armidale, the organisation provides a mix of youth work, training, accommodation and employment pathways, wrapped around long-term relationships rather than short programmes.

BackTrack's approach is built around belonging, practical skills, independence and giving back. Young people are not pushed out when things go wrong, they are supported to keep turning up and building confidence through work, learning and community life. As the REZ brings new workers and more pressure on housing, transport and families, services like BackTrack become even more important. Community benefit funding and local procurement linked to renewable energy projects could help strengthen youth services, training pathways and safe spaces for young people, so the social side of the transition keeps pace with the physical build.

## Focus Area 6: Community health and safety

There is widespread agreement that health and community services are not keeping pace with current needs let alone the growth expected with the NE REZ. Community members consistently stressed that health, aged care, and wellbeing should be central to REZ-related community investment – not an afterthought.

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*'We want projects to bring services that stay.'* – **community member**

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Through engagement activities, the community repeatedly identified opportunities to develop innovative health-service models that can meet the needs of both residents and temporary workers, while leaving a legacy. This is reflected in the outcome and actions below.

**Outcome 6: Reliable, well-resourced health, aged-care and community services that keep pace with a growing and changing population, with development actively supporting local wellbeing, safety and emergency readiness.**

Health and safety emerged as core priorities for the community.

### Strategy 6.1 Improve access to GP and allied health services

Armidale provides essential hospital and specialist services; however, access to local GP and allied health services is already constrained, with most practices unable to accept new patients. Peak NE REZ construction is expected to bring up to 3,000 workers to the Shire, placing additional pressure on primary care, mental health and community services.

The community has been clear that health and wellbeing must be central to REZ-related planning and investment. There is interest in exploring innovative service delivery models — including mobile and co-funded practitioner arrangements — that meet the needs of both residents and temporary workers while strengthening long-term local capacity.

The following actions focus on improving access, expanding capacity and ensuring that REZ growth contributes to enduring health outcomes.



Health transport supports local residents to get to medical appointments.

**Source:** The Next Economy

## Actions to improve access to GP and allied health services (6.1)

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>6.1.1</b> Local health workforce capacity is strengthened to meet increased demand.</p>	<p>NSW Health / Hunter New England Health (workforce planning and service delivery)</p> <p>Primary Health Network (PHN) (GP attraction and coordination)</p> <p>EnergyCo / RE proponents (peak workforce forecasts and potential co-funding)</p> <p>Local health providers (service delivery)</p> <p>UNE (training and accreditation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for additional GP and allied health positions aligned with REZ peak demand.</li> <li>• Raise workforce pressures through REZ coordination forums.</li> <li>• Support attraction initiatives that position Uralla as a desirable place for health professionals.</li> </ul>	<p>High</p>
<p><b>6.1.2</b> Innovative service delivery models expand access to GP and allied health services.</p>	<p>Hunter New England Health (clinical oversight and service integration)</p> <p>NSW Health (funding and program settings)</p> <p>RE proponents (temporary co-funding or shared service models)</p> <p>Private providers / mobile health services (delivery mechanisms)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore partnership models where developers contribute to expanded service delivery during peak construction.</li> <li>• Facilitate discussions between NSW Health, Hunter New England Health and proponents.</li> <li>• Support feasibility investigations for mobile or shared health hub models.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium</p>
<p><b>6.1.3</b> Health and community support services (including mental health, drug and alcohol) keep pace with population growth.</p>	<p>NSW Health (mental health and drug &amp; alcohol services)</p> <p>Community service providers (local support delivery)</p> <p>EnergyCo / proponents (accommodation and workforce management interface)</p> <p>NSW Police (where relevant to safety impacts)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for increased mental health, drug and alcohol support services during construction.</li> <li>• Monitor service demand and escalate risks early.</li> <li>• Encourage inclusion of community wellbeing commitments within accommodation and employment strategies.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium</p>

**Strategy 6.2 Maintain a safe community environment**

Many community members raised concerns about social disruption and safety risks associated with the large influx of male construction workers. Although three police officers are now permanently based in the region, Council is keen for developers to implement clear behavioural expectations for workers and ensure strong management of any antisocial behaviour.



A local police presence supports community safety.

**Source:** The Next Economy

During the construction of the New England Solar Farm, the developer, ACEN, responded quickly to antisocial incidents, helping to maintain cohesion among workers and with the broader community. This model is seen as a useful precedent for future projects.

A lack of recreational options was also identified as a concern, with the community wanting to create alternatives to the pub and gambling-focused activities.

Two key actions aim to maintain a safe and welcoming community environment.

**Actions to maintain a safe community environment (6.2)**

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>6.2.1</b> Policing and incident response capacity keeps pace with increased population and activity.</p>	<p>NSW Police (law enforcement and incident response)</p> <p>NSW Ambulance (medical emergency response capacity)</p> <p>NSW Fire and Rescue / RFS (fire and emergency response preparedness)</p> <p>Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) (cross-agency coordination and emergency planning)</p> <p>RE Proponents and major contractors (workforce management and site-based controls)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for policing and enforcement capacity aligned with peak workforce numbers.</li> <li>Maintain direct communication channels with NSW Police and proponents during construction.</li> <li>Monitor and escalate emerging safety concerns early.</li> </ul>	<p style="background-color: #4db6ac; color: white; text-align: center;">High</p>

What needs to happen	Community & Partners	What Council can do	Priority
<p><b>6.2.2</b> Recreational and community activities provide positive alternatives to pokies and pubs during peak construction</p>	<p>Local sporting and community clubs (activity delivery)</p> <p>Developers / accommodation providers (promotion and participation support)</p> <p>Community organisations (program coordination)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with local sporting and community organisations to scale inclusive activities.</li> <li>• Support funding applications for temporary event programming during peak construction.</li> <li>• Encourage workforce accommodation providers to promote participation in local activities</li> </ul>	

## Case Study: New England Family Support Services

### *Vital behind the scenes community support: New England Family Support Services*

New England Family Support Service runs neighbourhood centres in Uralla and Walcha that support people dealing with housing stress, family breakdown, mental health, domestic violence and financial crisis. For many, it is the first place they go when they need help navigating services or finding safe support. The service already works with people facing acute housing and wellbeing pressures. As the REZ brings a large construction workforce into the region, demand on rentals, health care, ambulances and community services is likely to rise, as seen in mining regions with FIFO and DIDO workforces.

Linking community benefit funding to services like this would help Uralla keep pace with change, rather than being left to absorb the social impacts on its own.

## Conclusion

Uralla Shire is preparing for a period of significant change as the NE REZ is developed. This Plan reflects community priorities and desire to ensure development strengthens community life, supports local livelihoods and protects the Shire's rural character. It provides a shared framework for Council, government, industry and the community to work together, ensuring impacts are managed fairly, benefits are long-lasting and decisions reflect what people across the Shire value most.

Council is engaging proactively to ensure community priorities are heard by government and industry. Through ongoing dialogue, formal advocacy and transparent communication, Council is reflecting community values back into project design, infrastructure sequencing and benefit arrangements so local knowledge helps shape decisions on the ground.

Implementation is underway. Council has already begun collaborating with EnergyCo and neighbouring councils, progressed work on long-term water solutions and identified options for workforce accommodation that can transition into permanent homes. These early actions show the Shire's commitment to moving from reactive responses to coordinated, place-based planning.

Alongside the community, Council will continue working closely with all levels of government, including EnergyCo, developers and neighbouring Councils to address existing and emerging infrastructure constraints early and plan for the long-term benefit of the Shire and its residents. This includes progressing priority actions in housing, water scarcity, waste and recycling, local jobs, health services and community cohesion. Further work will be staged as development progresses.

The success of this Plan relies on the collective effort of many stakeholders, including EnergyCo, developers and all levels of government. Uralla Shire Council sincerely thanks everyone who contributed their time, knowledge and lived experience throughout the REAP development process, and those who will continue to shape what comes next as this new era of development continues.

What comes next is an opportunity to turn planning into action and ensure the NE REZ delivers lasting value for generations of residents.

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## Appendix A: Community engagement

In developing the REAP, local residents were invited to participate in a series of engagement activities, held at different locations in the Uralla Shire Council, including the Uralla Central School, Uralla Bowls Club, Invergowrie Store, Uralla Courthouse and Kentucky Hall. These activities were held at different times and in different formats, to provide the opportunity for a wide cross section of the resident population to attend. The engagement activities were planned to:

- Provide the opportunity for the community to be heard
- Support respectful discussion between community members with differing views
- Focus on the future the community wants
- Focus on solutions – seek the best outcomes without dismissing the impacts
- Support community cohesion by building collective commitment to agreed outcomes

More than 150 members of the community participated in these engagement activities, including members of the following community, business and interest groups:

Sector	Organisation/group
<b>First Nations</b>	Moych Aboriginal Corporation Iwatta Aboriginal Corporation
<b>Environment</b>	New England Landcare ZNet Stringybark ecological services
<b>Local Business Community</b>	Uralla Business Chamber Main street businesses Seasons Of New England Sunhill Dairy Goats Townes Contracting
<b>Agriculture</b>	NSW Farmers Federation
<b>Young people</b>	Uralla Central School
<b>Health and social services</b>	New England Family Support Service
<b>Community groups</b>	Rotary Uralla Historical Society Red4NE
<b>Uralla Shire Council</b>	Councillors Staff