

Darkan

Community Development Action Plan



May 2023

Foreword



The Darkan Community Development Action Plan is a document that has been developed as a result of the participation by the community in the Rural Aid and Bank of I.D.E.A.S. Community Builders Program.

The opportunity to participate in this Program was timely and provided a core group of community members the chance to develop cohesion within the community and drive change for the betterment of the town and surrounds. The Program enabled the participants to learn about volunteering, asset mapping our community, engaging the younger generation in community contributions, and to hear about success stories from other communities. Space was provided in the Program to develop our own ideas and initiatives that could benefit our community.

A Community Opportunity Workshop (C.O.W.) event was held to engage the whole of the community, develop ideas and energise other individuals to contribute to the ongoing development of the community. This document is the product of that workshop and the learning experiences of the program participants. It outlines our assets, consolidates the community ideas, and has developed actions lead groups to progress these actions.

The Darkan community has always been resourceful and willing to contribute to its own development. This Community Development Action Plan aims to build on this community spirit, create a vibrant townsite and further develop the liveability of our rural lifestyle.

Acknowledgements



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Photo Credits: Caro Telfer, Astrid Volzke, Kerry Chia and Gerald Rose.

We acknowledge the Wilman Noongar people as the traditional custodians of this land. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.



Our Story



Darkan is the main town and administrative centre for the Shire of West Arthur and located on Wilman Noongar Boodja. It is situated 213Kms south of Perth and 115km east of Bunbury and nestled between the forests of the South-West and the Wheatbelt to the east. Population of the town is 194 persons, with 773 persons in the serviced district (2021 ABS Census).

Earliest occupation of the area was by the Wilman Aboriginal people. The name “Darkan” is a local Noongar word meaning “camping place of spirits”. Darkan Rock was the place where the spirits of unborn babies camped.

Colonial settlement in the area began in Arthur River in the 1850s as a result of the construction of the Perth to Albany Road. Settlement to the west of Arthur River (or 125 Mile as it was known at the time) occurred in 1860’s when the Gibbs family established a property called “Darkan”.

Agriculture became the mainstay industry of the area. The development of the rail line from Narrogin to Collie was opened in 1907 and the townsite was gazetted in 1906, growing quickly thereafter. The railway closed in the early 1990s, but the surrounding productive wool growing and mixed farming area, along with tourism, have ensured the town’s survival.

Darkan residents are proactive and continuously instigate initiatives to build the liveability, economic sustainability and appeal of the community. In 2018, after a 60-year absence, the local agricultural show was resurrected – Sheepfest is now a significant regional event demonstrating the pride and agricultural strengths of our district. A group of locals have recently come together and invested in the reopening of the Darkan hotel as a community venture, showcasing the community spirit that enables the community to continue to thrive.



Our Vision

To be a vibrant, caring, connected and proactive community that takes the lead in creating our future.'

Our Goals

Below are the six community goals which guide our community aspirations, namely –

- To retain families in the Shire by continually strengthening our liveable rural lifestyle and local employment opportunities.
- To continue to build an increasingly resilient, sustainable and vibrant agricultural sector.
- To actively pursue new economic and entrepreneurial opportunities that strengthen and diversify our local economy and business life.
- To create an environment where our young people feel involved, supported and empowered, and will consider returning to our community for work, business, family and lifestyle opportunities.
- To actively promote and showcase our community as a great place to stop, stay, experience, and reside, especially through a vibrant and welcoming town centre.
- To identify and implement initiatives that increase affordable housing and short term accommodation options.
- To support, promote and celebrate active community participation and build the capacity of our local people and organisations.
- To preserve, maintain and strengthen our community assets and heritage.



Our Guiding Values

The following eight guiding values and attitudes provide the context for our community's identified actions and initiatives, namely :

- **Rural village lifestyle** – retaining our unique country way of life, neighbour connections and rural landscapes.
- **Sense of community** – ensuring all our community members experience a deep sense of connection, inclusion, and contribution.
- **Embracing new opportunities** - building upon local assets, capacities and creativity; and facilitating opportunities that enable all residents to see and experience their community as a place of opportunity.
- **Collaboration** - appreciating community involvement, partnerships, collective action, volunteerism, and active citizenship.
- **Safe community** – maintaining high levels of community safety, low crime rate and community wellbeing.
- **Respect for heritage** – appreciating our unique heritage, stories and traditions and their importance in community and economic development.
- **Protection of the environment** – valuing and protecting our beautiful natural environment and its diverse and prolific flora and fauna.
- **Commitment to business development and success** - nurturing attitudes and behaviours that result in profitable business practices.

Our Challenges

Like many small inland rural communities, our community needs to respond creatively to a series of demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges. These issues include:

- Limited visitor infrastructure and attraction
- Business loss and service gaps.
- Static and ageing population.
- Lack of rental and short term worker accommodation.
- Limited marketing of community assets and appeal.
- Young people leaving the town for education reasons and due to lack of high school facilities.
- Increased climate volatility.
- Declining school numbers.
- Town Centre separated from Coalfields highway by rail reserve.
- Poor signage.
- Limited health services and allied health support.
- Declining doctor hours
- Limited range of local employment opportunities.
- No community progress group.
- Dependence on agriculture for employment and economic return.
- Growing mental health issues and limited support.
- Declining volunteerism and volunteer fatigue.



Our Assets

Physical

- Recreational facilities- Pool, Oval (with lights), Darkan Sports Club, basketball courts golf courses x3, synthetic bowling facilities x2, tennis courts x3, skydiving facility, halls (Town, Pioneer, Moodiarrup, Duranillin) rifle range, motorcross track, gym, playgrounds, skate park, pump track, free toilets and showers, Moodiarrup Sports Complex, Arthur River Hall, Arthur River Country Club, Men's Shed, churches x3, library, trampolines, railway reserve facilities.
- Towerrinning Lake Carbadine Pool, McDonald's pool, Hillman Rock, Darkan Rock, Nature reserves (Trigwell, Capercup, Haddleton, Arthur River)
- Collie - Darkin Rail Trail
- Airstrip
- Cemetery x2
- Rural landscapes dark skies natural bush
- Village nature
- Water farmland
- Geographic location and proximity to major centres and other towns
- Coalfields Highway
- Wildflowers

Social Networks

- Cultural Groups - Sewing Club, Book Club x2
- Sporting Clubs - Bowling x2, Golf x 2, Darts, Gun, Tennis, Football, Swimming, Basketball, Cricket, Motorcross, Netball, Skiing, Rifle, Netball travelling group
- Children recreation options - basketball, Auskick, ballet/dancing, cricket
- Social options - bingo, corporate bowls, social cricket, cardio tennis, gym, Be Active, Sewing Ladies, walking groups
- Seniors options - exercise, cooking, meals, Christmas party
- Churches - Catholic, Anglian, Uniting
- Community Gym, Men's shed, Hillman skydivers, speedway
- P & C, CWA, Women in farming, RSL, Lions, Bleat Newsletter
 - Cuteley busy bees, toy library

People

- Strong Volunteer base - caring citizens- can do spirit
- Safe and inclusive community
- Mens Shed
- Community champions, Community Builders Team, Sheepfest Committee, Community members buying the Pub
- Farmers, shearers, Kiwi Community
- Teachers, photographers, accountants, consultants, inventors, engineers, artists, tradespersons
- History and local knowledge
- Financial investment from locals
- Justice of the Peace
- Volunteer meals service for seniors
- Community Building Fund, Betty Brown scholarship
- Young people brought up in country, new residents
- Low crime rate
- Visiting skydivers
- Health personnel - doctors, nurses, childcare nurse, dentist, physio, pharmacy, podiatrist
- Lots of seniors
- Bleat Newspaper, 773 shire population
- Daycare
- Footy bus, community bus

Our Assets

Culture, Stories & Sources of Pride

- Heritage- National award winning Betty Brown Historical Centre, Nissan Hut, Arthur River historical buildings, Anzac Memorial, Six Mile Cottage, churches, Station precinct, hotel, district schools and halls, Darkan Sawmill Cottages, Bowelling Railway Station, West Arthur Heritage Trail
- Events - Sheepfest, Anzac Services, Christmas Tree, CWA International Womens Day, Aboriginal Cultural Day, Australia Day, WAX event, Birdy's Backyard Running Event
- Herbarium identification of West Arthur as a global hotspot
- Arboretum
- Resident artists
- Hayfields highway
- Information Bay
- Australia Day Awards, Previous Tidy Towns Awards Winner
- 'Backroads' TV program

Institutions

- West Arthur Shire Council- staff, facilities
- West Arthur Community Resource Centre
- Darkan Primary School
- Emergency services- Ambulance, Fire Brigade
- West Arthur Cottage Homes- 8 units
- Wagin Homecare, HACC, Mable/Incasa
- Darkan and Districts Sports Club
- Medical services
- RSL
- Westcare
- 4WDL Alliance, Wheatbelt Development Commission, RDA Wheatbelt
- Southwest Catchment Council, Blackwood Basin Group

Economic

- Strong farming area - reliable rain, fertile laterite/alluvial soils
- Agricultural industries - shearing contractors, Stud breeders, agricultural groups
- Tourism assets - wildflowers, cycling, astro tourism, heritage, Lake Towerrinning, Hillman Rock, rural landscapes, Carbadine Pool
- Sunday markets, Sports complex events, annual ram sale
- Sheepfest
- Food van
- Reopening of Pub
- The Bleat Newspaper
- Business services - post office, Westcare, Icon Ag/Compass, Darkan Agri, Putland Motors, Fleays, roadhouse x 2, coffee shop, 24 hour fuel, earth moving, opportunity shop, hairdresser, Elders, Pedericks Engineering, RW engineering, photographers, pharmacy, beautician, soil analysis
- Available industrial blocks, CBH grain storage bin
- Accommodation - 2 x air BNBs, B&B, caravan park, lake side camping
- Darkan buy & sell
- Proximity and links to Collie and its current economic reinvention and state funding

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme One

Community Connection & Capacity

ACTIONS

1

1. Create a West Arthur Progress Group.

Timeframe: Immediate

2. Continue to promote events that foster social connection:

- Encourage local businesses holding events to promote within The Bleat, CRC Face Book and Shire Face Book and install electronic sign.
- Work with the West Arthur Tourism committee to develop a social media platform to advocate for all events, workshops and activities.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

3. Undertake a 'Community Passion and Skills Audit'

Timeframe: Immediate

4. Instigate mechanisms for community connection to celebrate, share ideas, express aspirations and plan for the future.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

5. Develop and promote mechanisms for continual feedback of "Ideas"

(e.g. travelling Ideas board, at main events; Ideas Box at the CRC, Caravan Park and Main Street...)

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

6. Continue a local Community Builders Program that offers ongoing and regular community development training, information and access to regional, state and national skills development experiences.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

LEAD GROUP

Community Builders Team
SWA
WAPG

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

WACRC
WDC



Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Two

Resident & Business Attraction Strategy

ACTIONS

2

- 1. Develop a “Lifestyle and Business Attraction” Strategy to attract new residents and businesses by building upon the community’s beauty, welcoming and friendly spirit, proximity, quality of rural village lifestyle, senior supports, small school experience and business and agricultural strengths and opportunities.**

Form a Task Team to-

- Formulate strategy and slogan and translate into attractive flyer.
- Develop a three-minute YouTube video capturing the uniqueness of the community.
- Develop and implement promotional campaign including key media exposure.
- Add Sky diving YouTube video to the tourism promotion pages of the Shire.
- Develop follow-up responses to implement immediately following the “Backroads” TV program on Darkan.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

- 2. Develop a Corporate investment Plan.**

Timeframe: Short Term

- 3. Champion a local entrepreneurial development support initiative** that can promote, facilitate and assist local enterprise ideas and opportunities to become reality through connection to mentoring, workspace, information, networks and finance.

Timeframe- Short term & Ongoing

LEAD GROUP

**SWA
Task Team
WAPG
West Arthur Tourism Committee**

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**WRCRC
Rural Aid**

**WDC
RDAW**



Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Three

New Housing & Accommodation Options

ACTIONS

3

1. Mobilise community support and input to Shire's new housing initiatives.

Timeframe: Immediate

2. Undertake audit of existing land and housing availability including on farms in collaboration with the Shire of West Arthur.

Timeframe: Immediate

3. Undertake research into housing initiatives happening in other small rural communities.

Timeframe: Immediate to Short Term

4. Support the Shire of West Arthur's initiatives

to develop housing through assistance with housing design, investigations into housing providers (eg Tiny Homes and innovative modular building companies) and development of linkages to other community organisations such as West Arthur Cottage Homes and the Darkan Hotel Project.

Timeframe: Immediate to Short Term

LEAD GROUP

SWA

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

4WDL Alliance
WAPG
Rural Aid

CBH
Business community
RDAW



Theme Four

Marketing & Tourism

ACTIONS



1. Create a West Arthur Tourism Committee (WATC).

Timeframe: Immediate

2. Formulate and implement a Shire of West Arthur Tourism Plan and Branding Strategy including: -

- Work with the Shire to support the development of tourism outlined in the Shires Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 2033.
- Undertaking an audit of existing tourism products including Apps, print, social media and memberships.
- Contribute to the “Lifestyle and Business attraction” strategy YouTube mentioned in Theme 1 above.
- Support the development of Astro-tourism and its identification with the Shire of West Arthur.
- Support the development of cycling, hiking and wildflower tourism and its identification with the Shire of West Arthur.
- Advocate for a Shire tourism budget which supports the Tourism Development outlined in the Economic Development Plan.
- Investigate Agri- tourism opportunities.
- Review current social media platforms linked to the Shire and develop and resource a centralised platform for external promotion, especially via social media.
- Collaborate with tourism companies to promote Darkan as an eco-tourism destination.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

3. Provide input to the Shire of West Arthur regarding the development of a walk trail to Hillman Rock -

- Liaise with steering committee members to provide feedback on the proposal.
- Develop a friends of Hillman Rock group to help with construction of walk trails.
- Develop and promote flyer that showcase the flora, fauna and heritage of the trail.

Timeframe: Immediate to Long Term

4. Implement a signage audit.

- Undertake a signage audit of the townsite and surrounds and make recommendations.
- Advocate to the Shire of West Arthur to install additional tourism signage as part of its signage redevelopment program and investigate funding to implement the installation of tourism signage.
- Ensure signage and promotion of town and its attractions and facilities occurs through the region and not just at town entrances.

Timeframe: Immediate to Short Term

5. Support the development of Astro-tourism and its identification with the Shire of West Arthur.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

6. Support the development of cycling and hiking tourism and its identification with the Shire of West Arthur.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

LEAD GROUP

SWA

West Arthur Tourism Committee

WATC

Hillman Rock Steering Group

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Community residents
Rural Aid
WACRC

RDAW
WDC
AGO



Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Five Vibrant Town Centre

ACTIONS



- 1. Form a Task Team/Town Team to produce & implement an overall plan** to create a vibrant town centre that enhances the appeal of the Railway Reserve and creates a connection between the two key business streets.

Timeframe: Immediate

- 2. Activate town centre with art -**

- Form Art Task Team to design and implement artworks through the Railway reserve to draw visitors from the highway to the main street.
- Develop an Artwork plan and liaise with the Shire of West Arthur to implement plan.
- Review story and lessons from Cowaramup and their 42 life-size glass cows and investigate the installation of “sheep art” as an option for an art project.
- Seek external funding.
- Develop and support tourist attractions and infrastructure such as:
 - Quirky signage
 - Interactive and educational display on the sheep industry.
 - Street mural.
 - Light art installations to activate the area at night.

Timeframe: Immediate & Ongoing

- 3. Foster more “streetlife feel’ -**

- Introduce more CBD community pop up events, including Movie Nights.
- Urge more business activity on pavements and in Reserve.
- Introduce coffee van on Sundays.
- Lobby for traffic slowing treatments.
- Promote and assist with more inviting store frontages and windows.
- Investigate installation of lights around the pump track and playground area to activate the area at night.
- Promote the uniqueness of local businesses.

Timeframe: Medium Term & Ongoing

- 4. Instigate a regular Saturday morning Park Run**

Timeframe: Immediate

- 5. Revitalise interest in the Tidy Towns initiative & Tidy Towns Committee** through entering the 2023 Awards with identified community project.

Timeframe: Immediate

LEAD GROUP

**Art Task Team
SWA**

Tidy Towns Committee

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**Business Community
WAPG
Community Builders Team/
Town Team
Town Team Movement
RAC funding**

**TTM
DPS
WDC
Lotterywest/Healthways
KABC
RDAW**

ACTIONS



1. Form a Local Food Community Group to inform and advise on food initiatives and activate the following-

- Develop a quick reference guide in relation to market stall holder and food regulations.
- Explore potential for local regular food / artisan markets.
- Instigate a “buy-local” campaign.
- Identify areas of vulnerability / food stress, whilst exploring community food bank concepts.
- Explore food and nutritional education opportunities.
- Identify and strengthen food orientated networks in the region.
- Work with the Shire to identify a suitable area to establish and maintain a community food garden including local bushtucker foods for the community to develop and maintain.
- Coordinate a swap/sell of local fruit & vegetable system.
- Explore potential local food and bush tucker trails and funding source.
- Explore the potential of a community cooperative to purchase and operate the store.
- Explore potential local food and bush tucker trails and funding sources.

Timeframe: Immediate to Medium Term

2. Understand the food consumption requirements to support the growth of local food & beverage businesses including-

- Explore current business and suppliers catering for grocery distribution to the local community and visitors (i.e. Fleays, Food Van, Road House Butchers Hook, F&V Boxes, PFD, Falici Spuds).
- Explore food inventory requirements through consultation with community to identify regular stock inventory of food requirements.
- Explore food inventory requirements through tourism /lake audience/sky divers .
- Analyse food & beverage findings to further explore the option of developing local owned business(s) in town to support the community needs.

Timeframe: Immediate to Medium Term

3. Develop a Strategy to develop healthy local food options.

Timeframe: Short Term

4. Coordinate the selling and/or swapping of local fruit.

Timeframe: Short to Medium Term

5. Implement local food and bush tucker trails.

Timeframe: Short Term

6. Create regular food markets.

Timeframe: Short to Medium Term

7. Explore interest and resources for establishing a Community Garden and liaise with the Shire to determine the most appropriate location.

Timeframe: Short to Medium Term

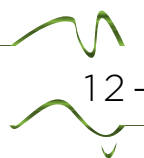
LEAD GROUP

Local Food Action Group

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**Wheatbelt Food community Group SWA
Business Community
West Arthur Tourism Committee
DPS**

**WAPG
Health providers
BCCM**



Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Seven

New Health Care Options

ACTIONS

- 1. Form Health Advisory Committee.**
Timeframe: Immediate
- 2. Develop asset inventory of health supports and assets.**
Timeframe: Immediate
- 3. Identify priority improvements through community survey.**
Timeframe: Immediate to Short Term
- 4. Raise funding for purchase of community vehicle for health care.**
Timeframe: Short to Medium Term
- 5. Develop a health care community transport scheme.**
Timeframe: Short to Medium Term

LEAD GROUP

Health Advisory Committee
SWA

OTHER PARTNERS

Health providers
Health professionals

WACRC
WDC

Theme Eight

Energy Independence

ACTIONS

- 1. Form an Energy Task team.**
Timeframe: Immediate
- 2. Undertake audit/survey of existing energy use and provision.**
Timeframe: Immediate
- 3. Undertake research into other small rural town energy initiatives, including identification of possible models and funding.**
Timeframe: Short term
- 4. Establish a West Arthur Energy Co-operative.**
Timeframe: Short to Medium Term
- 5. Promote best practices in energy use and collaboration.**
Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

LEAD GROUP

Energy Task team/Cooperative

OTHER PARTNERS

SWA
CBH- BCCM
Western Power
Synergy

Universities
WDC
RDAW

Our Strategies & Actions

Abbreviations:

AGO	Australia's Golden Outback
BCCM	Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals
DDSC	Darkan and Districts Sports Club
DPS	Darkan Primary School
KABC	Keep Australia Beautiful Council - Tidy Towns
RDAW	Regional Development Australia Wheatbelt
RSL	Returned Service League
SWA	Shire of West Arthur
TTM	Town Teams Movement
WACRC	West Arthur Community Resource Centre
WAPG	West Arthur Progress Group
WDC	Wheatbelt Development Commission



Darkan

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

