Acknowledgements
The Wellington Caves Master Plan report has been prepared by TRC Tourism Pty Ltd and Newscape Design for Dubbo Regional Council.

Disclaimer
Any representation, statement, opinion or advice, expressed or implied in this document is made in good faith but on the basis that TRC Tourism is not liable to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to in this document.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Site analysis</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Situation analysis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wellington Caves Master Plan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Implementation Plan</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Action Plan</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 1. Comparative Cave Tour Products and Prices</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix 2. Record of consultations</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

The first European record of caves at Wellington dates from 1826 and by 1830 fossil bones collected in the caves were sent to England for scientific study. These bones were mentioned in Darwin’s journal and influenced his “Law of Succession of Types” which was published in 1837.

Wellington Caves has been a visitor destination for around 150 years, with a reserve for the Preservation of Caves being established in 1884 and a permanent caretaker established onsite to manage visitation.

This Master Plan aims to identify opportunities to reinforce the attractiveness of Wellington Caves for visitors and create a compelling destination that is adapted to meet contemporary visitor expectations. The Master Plan provides an action plan for making the site an enjoyable destination, improve environmental performance and land management, and build partnerships with academic institutions and local business.
2 Context

The Wellington Caves Reserve is located 7.3km south of Wellington on the eastern side of the Catombal Range in the Bell River Valley, central northern NSW. The site is a 50 minute drive south of Dubbo, the main regional centre, and a 5 hour drive inland from Sydney, with main access via Mitchell Highway to Caves Road.

The region is a major agricultural area with some recreation and conservation sites. Nearby recreational attractions include the Taronga Western Plains Zoo, Old Dubbo Gaol, Lake Burrendong as well as the Catombal Range.

2.1 Organisational context

Wellington Caves is managed by Dubbo Regional Council as trustee of the Wellington Caves Crown Reserve. This reserve includes various land parcels including the adjacent golf course.

Dubbo Regional Council was recently formed from the amalgamation of Dubbo and Wellington Councils and the Wellington Caves Manager now reports into the Economic Development and Business Directorate of Council.

A dedicated Caves Manager manages a small team of staff and contract employees operating the café, cave tours and education programs. This team manage the visitor precinct, caravan park, karst and woodlands areas but not the golf course or adjacent Japanese Gardens. There are twelve in the onsite customer service team. The team includes the Manager, Education and Group Bookings Officer, kiosk attendants and Cave Guides. On an average day, there are three customer service staff and at peak times up to five.

Site maintenance is undertaken by the Council works team. A contract manager is responsible for undertaking the cleaning, general maintenance and after hour check-ins of the accommodation and campground.

2.2 Wellington Caves regional tourism context

Wellington Caves is a part of the Central NSW Tourism Region, and is represented within the Central NSW Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2013. The plan identified the region’s hero experience as the Taronga Western Plains Zoo. The DMP also acknowledged stagnation in visitor levels from 2000 – 2012 in Central NSW. The Plan recognised the need to improve the appeal of destinations and upgrade the quality of experiences to grow the visitor economy. Target markets identified in the DMP included Visiting Friends and Relatives and holiday visitors interested in natural and cultural heritage. Domestic day visitors were also seen as a growing market sector, with opportunities to entice them to stay overnight through good value products and high-quality services.

Specific opportunities to grow regional visitation were identified through sports tourism, caravan and camping holidays, culinary tourism, visiting friends and relatives, heritage and culture. Nature tourism was also identified as presenting an opportunity for growth in tourism.

Changes in visitor aspirations were identified, including: seeking enriching experiences that offer active participation, emphasis on expectations of high quality and sustainable experiences (evidenced by certification). Other opportunities identified for the region included an increasing interest in “legacy” tourism, accessible tourism, and Chinese FIT tourism, where businesses can meet the needs of target markets.
The Destination Management Plan identifies the region’s core visitor segments as Wanderers and VFR. It also identifies the region’s appeal to growing market sectors of cultural heritage and culinary tourism. Additional opportunities for the region identified in the DMP include promoting the local character of the region, increasing adoption and promotion of the region’s commitment to sustainability measures, growing the emphasis on quality (infrastructure) and promotion of the region’s local produce (100 Mile Diet to showcase local, fresh / organic produce).

Wellington Caves has the potential to respond to many of these identified opportunities.

### 2.2.1 The region and its visitors

Tourism Research Australia does not have a tourism profile for the former Wellington local government area, however there is tourism profile data available for the former Dubbo local government area 2016.

Dubbo region has more domestic day (500,000) than domestic overnight (440,000) visitors. The average stay for overnight visitors is 2 nights, with $201 spent per night (VFR accommodation) or $252 per night (commercial accommodation). Domestic day visitors spend on average $230 per day. ‘Holiday’ is the main reason for domestic overnight and domestic day visitors, with ‘Visiting Friends and Relatives’ and ‘Business’ the equal second reasons for domestic overnight visitation. The Dubbo region has a small number of international visitors (9,000), who report ‘holiday’ and ‘visiting friends and relatives’ as their reason for travel.

Accommodation in ‘home of friend or relative’ is the most common category (423,000 nights), with ‘hotel or similar’ second (362,000 nights) and commercial camping / caravan park (118,000) nights.

Destination NSW data for Travel to Central NSW indicates slow to stagnant growth in visitor numbers in the period 2013 – 2017, with a steady growth in visitor nights 2014-2017 overcoming a drop in numbers from 2013. Intrastate visitors make up most visitors (74.5%) and share of nights (74.6%) in the region. Regional NSW is the largest source of visitors (45%) and Sydney (29.5%).

The top activities reported by visitors to Central NSW were:

- 41.5% eat out, dine at restaurant or café
- 26.4% go shopping for pleasure
- 25.2% visit friends and relatives
- 9.4% sightseeing or looking around
- 7.2% pubs, clubs, discs

The data is at the regional level, however it would indicate a significant number of visitors to the region are not currently visiting attractions such as the Wellington Caves, presenting an opportunity to attract new visitors to the region and to change the behaviour of existing visitors.

Dubbo City Regional Airport passenger numbers in 2015/16 were reported at 203,294, a significant 38% increase on 2014/15 (188,907). This was the result of new air routes connecting Dubbo with Brisbane, Melbourne and Newcastle.

### 2.2.2 Regional population

According to the ABS 2016 Census, the Dubbo Region’s population is 50,077. Remplan Economy Profile Data states that the Dubbo Regional Council services a region of 120,000 people.

### 2.2.3 Social media

There is overwhelmingly positive feedback on TripAdvisor of the caves and mine tours, also the campground and facilities. In fact, many of the comments are very positive and it would be good to feature the most recent positive reviews on the website home page if possible.

---

1 Tourism Research Australia, Local Government Area Profiles 2015, Dubbo NSW

2 Destination NSW, Travel to Central NSW, Year ending March 2017
There is quite a bit of commentary on the phosphate mine tour being surprisingly interesting – it may be worth reviewing how this is presented / marketed. It could be that the appeal of this experience is not adequately described? Focus groups or some follow up interviews with participants on the tour could help identify areas for improvement / surprisingly positive aspects of this tour.

Some comments related to visitor expectations of a ‘family ticket’ option – the purchase of individual tickets for each family member is unexpected (presumably this is in the case of families with more than 2 children). There are some reviews which mention being put off the tours by service levels in the café.

Social media needs to be carefully managed by replying to the reviews and there are guidelines on best practice e.g. thanking for taking the time to review and follow up on both positive and negative comments. TripAdvisor has guidance on how to manage your listing and optimising your engagement with visitors and their feedback.

There are some excellent images featuring the tag Wellington Caves on Instagram – it would be good from a marketing point of view to feature these (or links to them) on the Wellington Caves website, also to comment on the images to build engagement and reputation of the site. It appears one person that has posted on Wellington Caves is a professional photographer / TV producer based in Sydney with links to the area and this person should be contacted to foster a relationship and feature some of his images or entice creative types (e.g. Artist in Residence program, followed by an Exhibition event onsite and in Sydney).

2.3 Major regional attractions

2.3.1 Taronga Western Plains Zoo

Taronga Western Plains Zoo is recognised in the Great Western Plains DMP Action Plan as the region’s main visitor attraction and drawcard. Visitor origins for Taronga Western Plains Zoo broadly mirror those to Dubbo region, with 42% coming from NSW intrastate, 27% Sydney 30% Interstate and 1% international. Paid attendance to Taronga Western Plains Zoo was reported at 226,378 in 2015/16 (up 7.9% from 209,720 in 2014/15). Total attendance (including paid, free of charge and function guests) at Taronga Western Plains Zoo was 260,102 people in 2015/16.

The Taronga Zoo Strategic focus areas identified in the Zoo’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan include ‘Conservation Outcomes’, ‘Transformational Guest Experiences’, ‘Excellence in Conservation Outcomes’ and ‘Engage and Influence’.

The Taronga Western Plains Zoo Annual Report identified success with digital marketing during 2016, and growth in local admissions (Dubbo and region) through ‘Mates Rates’ and Zoo Friends memberships. Advertising across the wider Central West NSW region was reported as driving strong visitation from within a two hour radius of Dubbo. Online ticket sales offering an Autumn discount resulted in online ticket sales increasing from 5% to 31% of General Admissions.

2.3.2 Old Dubbo Gaol

2015/16 visitors to Old Dubbo Gaol 46,829 (8% growth from 43,359 in 2014/15). The Old Dubbo Gaol is managed by the Dubbo Regional Council and attracts visitors from education groups, VFR visitors to Dubbo, special interest groups (such as Probus), caravan and camping and free and independent visitors.
The Old Dubbo Gaol also hosts special events (community oriented) featuring regional cuisine and music events. It is primarily a heritage tourism experience. The special events generate local PR opportunities and create engagement with the site amongst locals.

### 2.3.3 Western Plains Cultural Centre

Encompassing the collections of the Dubbo Museum and Dubbo Regional Gallery, 2015/16 visitor numbers were 92,471 (1% decrease from 2014/15). This is a high quality, regionally significant cultural attraction, comprising art gallery, museum and café.

### 2.3.4 National Parks in the Wellington Region

NSW NPWS do not identify any of their reserves in the Wellington area as having significant visitor numbers, and do not have accurate visitor data available. The Jenolan Caves are a major and well known visitor Caves site in the Blue Mountains and their visitation levels are reported as growing modestly over the past three financial years:

- **2013/14**: 226,529
- **2014/15**: 230,261
- **2015/16**: 233,739

### 2.4 Site Extent

The Crown Reserve (No. 120078) totals 154.98ha including Lots 335 (Caravan Park), 333 (Golf Course), 334 (Caves and Bushland) & Portion 302 but does not include Portion 315 where Golf Course Club House is located. The Reserve was designated for Public Recreation & Environmental Protection in 1989.

The site extent for this Masterplan includes lots 335 (Caravan Park), 334 (Caves and Bushland) as well as the intersection of Mitchell Highway and Caves Road on Lot 2.

Features surrounding the Wellington Caves Reserve include:

- Wellington Golf Course directly south of the caravan park
- Japanese Gardens directly opposite and north of the entrance carpark
- Private residents/shops to the north along Caves Road. These include a woodworking shop, model train collection, bottle house souvenir shop and a fossil collection.

---

4 Dubbo Regional Council Annual Report
3 Site analysis

3.1 Natural Context

(See Drawing 078.012)

3.1.1 Terrain

The eastern two thirds of the Reserve is undulating terrain rising some 40m above the flood plain. Two limestone outcrops run parallel forming ridgelines on a north/south axis on the eastern half of the reserve. Many caves are found in the western limestone area with six caves of significant size: Cathedral Cave, Gaden Cave, Mitchell Cave, Lime Kiln Cave, Gas Pipe Cave, Anticline (Water) Cave as well as a historic Phosphate Mine.

Most of the eastern two thirds of the Reserve is covered with ‘White Box/Yellow Box/Blakely’s Red Gum Woodland’ which is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community.

The western third of the Reserve is a flood plain on the eastern side of the Bell River where the Wellington Golf Course is located. The flood plain alluvium is highly permeable and water exchanges readily from Bell River to surrounding alluvial soils, making it flood-prone.

3.1.2 Geology

Two massive limestone outcrops form the two north-south trending karst formations.

Bell Valley Alluvials (sands and gravels) occupy most of the golf course and western part of the caravan park. This alluvium contains significant aquifers which are the principal source of domestic and irrigation water for the Caravan Park and Golf Course.

Between the limestone formations are varying thicknesses of silts and gravels.

A variety of interesting crystal and rock formations have formed within the limestone of the cave systems, most notably the altar within Cathedral Cave.

Sandstones composed of fine bone fragments, conglomerates and phosphate rocks are found within the Phosphate Mine.

3.1.3 Hydrology

There are no permanent streams on reserve although several erosion gullies drain to the north. Runoff drains north west across the Caravan Park from the adjacent ridge.

The Bell River to the west occasionally floods across the golf course to the break of slope in the caravan park. High levels in Bell River will also recharge the Bell River alluvial aquifer, eventually rising into the caves when there is high rainfall.

Two of the caves, McCavity and Limekiln Cave are permanently filled with water and the lower reaches of other caves, such as Cathedral Cave are flooded.

3.1.4 Flora

Much of the native vegetation of the Reserve is a Grassy White Box Woodland community.

Previous disturbance and clearing because of mining, grazing and cultivation has resulted in degraded habitat with few understorey species and mature trees.

A distinct community of native vegetation grows on the limestone outcrops. This is dominated by Kurrajong and White Box with Clematis and Hardenbergia climbing over the limestone.
A few juvenile Callitiris are found in the northern part of the Reserve.

Five vegetation zones have been identified at the Reserve (from west to east):

- a riverine zone of River Red Gum and River Sheoak
- the golf course zone which grades from River Red Gum to Yellow Box to White Box on the foot slopes
- the caravan park zone of introduced species
- the caves zone of introduced species (predominantly African Olive)
- the cattle lease zone which is a woodland with an understorey of introduced species (the Grassy White Box Woodland community).

3.1.5 Fauna

Wellington Caves is a highly significant locality for fossils, most notably the first finding of the giant marsupial Diprotodon bones with the largest deposit of Plio-Pleistocene mammal fossils in Australia.

Cave dwelling bats such as the Vulnerable Eastern Bent-wing Bat (Miniopterus schreibersii) inhabit some of the caves opportunistically.

Fauna surveys from 1990 show found common house mice, rabbits, foxes, cats, rats, possums, echidnas, common native birds, sparrows and assorted skinks in the area.

The NPWS Atlas of NSW Wildlife reveals that Endangered or Vulnerable species such as the Tiger Quoll, Superb Parrot and Glossy Black Cockatoo are within 10km of the Reserve but have not been recorded on the Reserve itself.

3.2 Scenic Views and Points of Interest

(See Drawing 078.012)

The six show caves provide considerable interest for sightseeing: most popular are Cathedral Cave, Gaden Cave and the Phosphate Mine where guided tours take place.

The entrances to the caves have low aesthetic value because of the municipal treatment of fencing, gates, stairs and pathways.

The historic Phosphate Mine is wheelchair accessible and has different entry and exit points which enhance the experience.

The lower slopes of the karst area adjacent to the day use area are weedy and degraded while the upper slopes are more densely vegetated and have more scenic appeal.

There are beautiful views to the west and north west to the mountain ranges, as well as up the ridge to the south west. The visitor facilities and campground detract from the visual character of this natural setting.
3.3 Existing Facilities
(see Site Components for more detail)
(See Drawing 078.010)

- Caravan, Camping and Accommodation area:
  - 36 powered sites
  - 25 Campsites
  - 14 roofed accommodation (7 Caves suites and 7 Gold View suites)
  - 4 park cabins
  - Recreation room
  - Camp Kitchen, pool and 5 undercover BBQ areas
  - Laundry

- Day Visitor Carpark

- Day Visitor Area:
  - Caves Café, Souvenir Shop and Visitor Information in the Caves House building which dates from the 1930s
  - Exhibition space at Sibbald’s Cottage
  - Shelter
  - Small playground
  - Decommissioned Aviary

- Four amenities buildings
- Caretakers cottage and storage space
- Karst Area where guided Caves Walks are located
- Fossil Trail to the south of the accommodation precinct

3.4 Circulation and Access
(See Drawing 078.011)

Day use access is from the carpark, although it is unclear to arriving visitors where the main entry point is. Day use of the site is constrained to the day use area behind the Café, cave trails (accessible on tour only) and the self-guided Fossil Trail.

Most of the visitor precinct is occupied by the caravan/camping/accommodation area. Access for overnight visitor vehicles is via a boom gate off the main entry carpark. The caravan/camping area contains an excessive number of roads for vehicle access and this means it is not pedestrian friendly.

There is limited opportunity for visitors to undertake independent activities as a tour guide must be present in the fenced Karst area and few other walking opportunities are available.
4 Situation analysis

Wellington Caves has been a popular visitor destination for many years.

The guided experience is successful and enjoyable for visitors, however the site condition in both the visitor precinct and natural areas is degraded and tired. An apparent lack of planning over many years has created a disjointed product which impacts on the visitor experience and means the site does not operate efficiently.

The amalgamation of the former Wellington and Dubbo Councils to form the Dubbo Regional Council presents significant opportunities for Wellington Caves.

Significant funding has recently been made available through the NSW Government Innovation Fund. Dubbo Regional Council has the benefit of a greater pool of expertise which can be engaged to support management of the site and importantly there are improved opportunities for coordinated marketing and cross promotion of the Caves with other Council managed and regional attractions.

4.1 Potential for growth

There is considerable potential for growing visitation to the Wellington Caves precinct throughout the year including during current shoulder and off-peak seasons. There is capacity for the site (and within current staffing levels) to host increased numbers of cave tours, accommodation occupancy and general day use of the precinct by visitors and the local community.

Given the importance of regional visitors and their friends and family, focus should be given to ensuring the site caters for enjoyable recreational activities to encourage repeat visitation by locals and their visitors.

4.2 Competitor destinations

Based on the current positioning of Wellington Caves, competitor destinations include other regional attractions, cave sites elsewhere in Australia and alternative accommodation and campground sites within the Western Plains region.

There is a lack of publicly accessible, reliable, contemporary data available about cave site visitors, their motivations and preferences.

It is unlikely that other cave sites are significant competitors to Wellington Caves because they are some distance away and current visitors are primarily from the local region. Entrance fee data for other cave sites across Australia and NZ looking at packaging, pricing and promotions such as family tickets is however relevant to considering the value for money of Wellington Caves. These are included at Appendix A.
4.3 Main site components

4.3.1 Entry Area

(See Drawing 078.003)

The turnoff from the Mitchell Highway onto Caves Road is the first opportunity to create a positive impression of the site. The intersection is generally a flat, open grass area with a native tree background.

The area contains several elements that are currently difficult to appreciate and do not contribute to a positive impression of the site.

The approaches to the turnoff have a series of Roads and Maritime Services brown tourist signs. These are dated and some are faded. Some are large and contain more than four lines of text and are therefore too difficult to read at the 100 kph speed limit.

The intersection is dominated by the Wellington Gateway Sculpture, a well-known landmark constructed using part of the bridge which collapsed in Wellington in 1989. This sculpture is of significance to the local community and many people were involved in its construction.

The sculpture is large and dominates the intersection however it needs to be viewed close up to appreciate its artistic merit. Consequently, there is a large paved carpark with a number of advertising signs. This detracts from the arrival experience.

There are two Wellington Caves Signs. These are of rustic construction and relatively small in scale. They are competing with numerous nearby signs.

Ideally, this site requires an upgrade that provides a strong sense of arrival for visitors. This could be done by providing a new “Wellington Caves” signage element, that is larger and favourably portrays the character of the site.

The carpark for the Wellington Gateway Sculpture could be improved with planting along the road edge to reduce the visual impact of the large paved area and numerous signs. An avenue of native trees, between the Entry Area and the Main Visitor Area would link these two spaces and also improve the sense of arrival for visitors.

4.3.2 Main Visitor Area

(See Drawing 078.005)

The immediate approach to the main visitor precinct is dominated by a row of neighbouring buildings. These have a generally poor aesthetic with a mixture of built form and landscape treatments. A consistent upgrade of the streetscape here could improve the appearance. A path link is required between the village, Japanese garden and the Visitor Experience Centre.

The large main carpark is an unattractive arrival point. It lacks shade however the pavement is in good condition and suitable for continued use with some refinements. The parking layout looks to be efficient, so an upgrade in appearance and visitor flow should be considered.

The day visitor area has a mixture of buildings with various architectural styles. The main Caves House and Sibbald’s Cottage are of heritage significance and to be retained for re-use.

There are some large silky oak trees which enhance the area, and whilst they do constrain the opportunities for site development, they should be retained if possible and incorporated into the upgraded design for the site.

There is a mixture of open space areas between buildings, a small children’s’ playground, toilet, aviary and large shelter which could potentially be demolished or relocated to provide development space for a new Visitor Experience Centre and associated landscape.
The karst area has good landscape potential but is heavily degraded by understorey clearing and weed infestation. There are disused water tanks and power lines detract from naturalness of the site and contribute to visual clutter. The main fence line has a municipal appearance. It is highly desirable to undertake bush regeneration / revegetation to return the karst area landscape to a good condition. The walk through the karst area is an important part of a cave tour.

The cave access pathways have low quality surface and handrail barriers and the fencing of caves and cave entries are unattractive. An upgrade of pathways and barriers is desirable to provide an improved walkway surface which is disabled compliant between the visitor centre and phosphate mine. The other consideration is the best way to fence the cave areas for visitor safety. Two options for consideration are fencing of the path edge and fencing of the cave wholes. It is likely that a mixture of both methods will be required.

The accommodation area occupies a large part of the site with a range of accommodation options including two buildings, 3 cabins, caravan park, central amenities building with laundry and pool, camp kitchen, several bbq shelters and free-form camping on flood prone area.

The two motels have been recently upgraded and provide a good experience for visitors – especially families with children. Individual barbecues to the golf view rooms would be a welcome addition to provide a self-catering option.

The Anticline cave in the centre of the precinct has been partially filled in and is fenced with municipal fencing and is not accessible for the public. Potential to re-open the cave should be explored.

Caravan park on the site is typically larger than the industry standard, but staff at the caves have observed that visitors typically appreciate the generous nature and drive through design of these facilities, and therefore it is the preference to keep this area intact as much as possible.

Landscape treatments currently include basalt stone edging which is of local historical significance to Wellington. This should be retained, however new edging and walling in the upgraded visitor area should ideally incorporate a limestone material, similar to the local rock type.
Wellington Gateway Sculpture
- Well known landmark in the area
- Currently dominates the caves entry area

Sculpture Carpark
- Very large paved area detracts from landscape appearance

Wellington Caves Signs
- Rustic construction
- Relatively small scale and competing with numerous nearby signage

Landscape Character
- Generally a flat, open grass area with native tree background.
4.4 Management arrangements

There is a small management team based on site and this is supported by the corporate and policy areas of Council as well as by local works crews. The Wellington Caves Business Unit pays a dividend for the provision of these support services.

The utilisation of corporate support for financial and human resource management is sensible as this relieves the local manager of the burden of operating these systems. A point of sale system is currently being established for the site and there is significant potential to expand this into a customer relations management system to support ongoing relationships with customers.

The relevant economic, business development and tourism promotion areas of Council are still being formed however there is significant potential for these units to support local management to implement the relevant recommendations of this master plan as well as provide strategic direction and coordination of business units throughout the Council area and the wider region.

Support from Council works crews appears to function effectively as they are also maintaining other Council assets in the area. As new facilities and assets are brought on line there will need to be maintenance plans prepared and clear arrangements in place so that the site is consistently maintained in a presentable condition. Local management will need to be given a level of control so that maintenance staff can respond to issues as they arise to keep the site fully operational throughout the year.

This master plan also identifies the need for further effort in land management activities such as pest and weed management, as well as flora and fauna rehabilitation programs, and these will require additional support which is probably beyond the current capacity of Council teams.

4.5 Associated businesses and activities

There is a variety of businesses and activities currently associated with the Wellington Caves site, in addition to the Wellington Caves tours, kiosk and accommodation. These include:

- Wellington Osawano Japanese Gardens
- Wellington Golf Course – golf course with associated club house, open to visitors with the potential to cater for visitors to the Wellington Caves and accommodation, by allowing visitors to play on the course and to cater for meals.
- Three small businesses on private properties on the road leading to the Wellington Caves (within 100m of the Caves precinct) – Caves wood Gallery and Gifts, train collection, fossil collection and bottle house and curios.
- Wellington Gateway Sculpture – located at the turnoff to Wellington Caves on the Mitchell Highway (approximately 400m from Wellington Caves). This is a site of local cultural significance, a potential point of interest to travellers driving through and those turning off to the Wellington Caves.
- Old Sydney Road from Wellington Caves into the township of Wellington – this runs parallel to the Mitchell Highway, and could potentially be promoted as an active transport option link between Wellington and the Wellington Caves.
- The Wellington Caves scientific research, including the newly formed partnership with the Australian Museum, Flinders University and Natural History Museum of London.
## 5 Wellington Caves Master Plan

The main purpose of this master plan is to provide a clear direction for the management, operation and development of the site to transform the place into a significant regional destination for both visitors and residents.

Management has prepared a statement of the Mission, Vision and Objectives for the place and the master plan has been drafted to contribute to the realisation of these goals. The specific actions to achieve this are set out in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WELLINGTON CAVES CORPORATE PLANNING</th>
<th>MASTER PLAN RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our mission is to be a leading example in exceptional visitor experiences that create understanding, foster appreciation and result in protection and conservation of the natural environment.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### VISION STATEMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awaken a sense of wonder &amp; curiosity, to ignite the imagination and stimulate thought-provoking questions.</th>
<th>The sequence of spaces and experiences assists in telling the story and especially highlights the significance of the fossils on the site.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a connection to nature and to the beauty of the natural world, and through that connection stimulate the urge to care for and protect it.</td>
<td>The landscaping of the visitor precinct and the surrounding woodland is managed and maintained as an intact and functioning native ecosystem through careful design and land management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create moments of mindfulness.</td>
<td>Built infrastructure both above and below ground in the karst precinct is designed and constructed to be of high quality while being unobtrusive. This includes walkways, stairs, handrails and electrical installations. The guided experience is carefully designed to be entertaining and informative and tells the full story of the formation and human use of the caves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurture a creative and innovative culture.</td>
<td>Facilities are designed to make the visitor and employee experience safe and efficient. Facilities are designed and managed to ensure minimal environmental impact. Partnerships with academic institutions encourage and facilitate research activities on site and allow for visitor participation. All staff are trained to assist visitors understand and enjoy the full range opportunities available on the site and in the adjacent precinct. Management lead by demonstrating the desired behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WELLINGTON CAVES CORPORATE PLANNING</td>
<td>MASTER PLAN RESPONSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be an employer of choice, known for its outstanding people</td>
<td>Employment arrangements are secure and include ongoing skills development and opportunities to vary and adapt roles as employee circumstances evolve. Facilities are designed to make the visitor and employee experience safe and efficient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create memories and opportunities for people to connect by being a holiday destination of choice.</td>
<td>The full range of opportunities on site is communicated to visitors before and during their visit. Operations are coordinated and packaged experiences are offered with additional experiences available to those staying overnight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OBJECTIVES**

| Provide stimulating, inspiring and innovative experiences that connect our visitors to nature and the history of the site in order to competitively position Wellington Caves as a “must do” tourist attraction in the Central West | The sequence of spaces and experiences assists in telling the story and especially highlights the significance of the fossils on the site. The guided experience is carefully designed to be entertaining and informative and tells the full story of the formation and human use of the caves. |
| Generate sufficient financial returns to economically thrive, with the vision to be able to invest profits generated back into enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring the conservation & continued research of the reserve | The full range of opportunities on site is communicated to visitors before and during their visit. Operations are coordinated and packaged experiences are offered with additional experiences available to those staying overnight. |
| Minimise visitor impacts on the reserve and promote positive action to protect the natural environment and have a positive impact on the planet | The landscaping of the visitor precinct and the surrounding woodland is managed and maintained as an intact and functioning native ecosystem through careful design and land management. Facilities are designed and managed to ensure minimal environmental impact. |
5.1 Overall site

Use of the Wellington Caves site has a long history of visitation as well as scientific research as well as the period of mining activity in the karst area. This has led to the haphazard development of facilities in the reserve as they were developed on an as needs basis. This has resulted in a site with components that do not relate well together. This masterplan aims to rectify this issue by creating a strong sense of arrival for visitors and a clear program of uses within the main visitor precinct.

The upgrade works are also planned to reinforce the existing role of the visitor precinct as an outdoor passive recreation area through development of a regional playground and picnic facilities in a parkland setting. New pathways and nature trails will strengthen connections to adjoining areas and provide new recreation opportunities.

All new access within the main visitor precinct will be designed to create an inclusive experience for all visitors including those with reduced mobility. The phosphate mine presents an opportunity to provide a greater experience for visitors with limited mobility. The pathway to the phosphate mine will require some re-alignment and surface improvements to provide a fully compliant access connection for disabled visitors, however this upgrade is a worthy addition and could lead to increased visitation by visitors looking for an accessible nature based experience.

It is envisaged that the provision of new school / group use (dormitories) will enable Wellington Caves to significantly increase visitation from school groups while also providing a cheaper alternative for scientists and other groups. Provision of a luxury accommodation option located along the ridge south of the main visitor node has potential to further increase accommodation revenue by adding an additional market segment. These two new accommodation styles, combined with the existing motel, cabin, caravan and camping options will help to reinforce Wellington Caves as an overnight tourist destination and capitalise on the existing tourist trade accessing the region via Mitchell Highway.

Providing overnight packages including night-time cave tours and potentially meals will further enhance these opportunities.

5.2 Precincts

5.2.1 Entry Precinct

With upgraded and clearer signage along Mitchell Highway, visitors will be on the lookout for the Wellington Caves “turn off” and the upgraded signage and landscape treatments will signal their arrival at this location. The proposed limestone walling comprised of large 500x500x1000 stone blocks with oversize letters will be that are visible from both directions. A natural vegetation backdrop is planned to frame the sign and leads visitors down Caves Drive. The Wellington Gateway Sculpture will be better integrated into the entry precinct by tree planting into the existing carpark.

5.2.2 Caves Drive

A native tree tunnel will be crated along Caves Drive to link the entry area to the main visitor area. The tree species would include native Eucalypt trees and Silky Oaks (Grevillea robusta) with an understory planting of low native grasses to create a natural and low maintenance landscape treatment.

5.2.3 Caves Village

Individual shops and displays within the village provide cave visitors with additional things to do during breaks between cave tours. The appearance of this area will be significantly improved by the proposed native tree tunnel. The road verge will also be upgraded with a new fencing and a concrete footpath for access between the village and day visitor area.
5.2.4 Main Carpark

The large expanse of bitumen pavement will be upgraded with garden beds to improve appearance and tree planting will also provide shade to visitors. The layout of the carparking spaces will remain largely unchanged. A drop off area for coaches and trailers will be formalised along the eastern side of the carpark.

5.2.5 Day Visitor Precinct

The two heritage buildings in this precinct are the key character influences at the interface with the carpark, and greatly contribute to sense of arrival. We propose to relocate the Dippy sculpture to the centre of a paved courtyard adjoining the entry. In his new location, Dippy will be much more prominent and become one of the main “iconic shareable moment” at Wellington Caves. From here visitors will proceed to the new Visitor Entry Building located behind, and connected to the back existing kiosk. The new building will fully integrate with the existing with a link being the main entry and orientation space, with a modern functional building beyond.

On the western side of the main north-south pathway will be a new regional playground. The playspace will have four main areas:

1. Waterplay with stalactite fountains, stream showing water levels which well up and stepping stones over
2. Megalizard slide (kids climb up into mouth, walk along spine and slide down tail with the level change)
3. Fossil area (these would be moulds covered in sand that kids could dig up and reveal using tools and sieve system etc.)
4. Cave cubby house, a cave-like structure that kids can crawl into and climb up to a platform with rope ladders, rock walls, etc. Could have mine carriage at entrance.

The existing picnic facilities in this area would be upgraded with a separate barbecue shelter and a few picnic shelters with picnic tables. There would be extensive grass areas for informal picnics under shade trees.

The Anticline Cave would be upgraded with a terraced seating area on the southern side, ending with a viewing platform and fencing to prevent visitors entering the cave. It is envisaged that this area could be used as an amphitheatre for school group meetings and performances.

5.2.6 Accommodation Precinct

It is the preference of most stakeholders that the accommodation area is left largely untouched. Visitors like the large spread out camping and caravan sites and the numbers of spaces are to be preserved. The two motel blocks have been recently refurbished.

A new dormitory to the south east of this precinct is proposed along the karst area boundary to provide much needed space for school children and their teachers. It is envisaged that the dormitory would also be used by scientists doing research at the caves and potentially by visiting sporting groups.

A new service yard and storage shed would be provided to the south-eastern corner of the precinct.

Six new luxury cabins are proposed to the ridge area south of the accommodation precinct overlooking the fossil trail, golf club and Bell River. These cabins would be approximately 80 square meters in size and decorated in cave theme. One potential option for consideration is saw cutting into the existing limestone rock to create a rock walled enclosure and then providing an earth covered roof to create an underground cave house with views out to the west onto the nearby hills.
5.2.7 Karst area
The first priorities for karst improvement include an upgraded disabled accessible concrete track up to the phosphate mine with upgraded galvanised handrail barriers. It is proposed that the sides of the tracks be fenced with barriers in the lower section of the main karst area to prevent visitors falling into cave holes. In the upper sections of the main karst area (uphill of Mitchell Cave), the recommended approach to safety swaps to fencing of the hazards that are immediately adjoining pathways. The appearance of fencing should be a fabricated galvanised barrier aimed at blending with the natural environment. Where possible, unnecessary direction changes for the barrier should be minimised as a way of minimising visual impacts.

5.2.8 Overflow Carpark
The overflow carpark is currently a large triangular shaped grass area accessed off Caves Road. We propose that this site be improved with tree planting to provide shade and delineate parking areas.

5.2.9 Old Sydney Road
This country laneway provides a local road connection between Caves Village and Wellington. It currently has a very rough surface and is subject to flooding, but would be suitable for upgrading for bicycle access for visitors and residents.
Caves Drive
- Avenue of native trees to eventually create a green ‘tunnel’ connection to the day visitor node

Sculpture Carpark
- Reduce paved area and provide tree planting

New Caves Entry
- Limestone retaining walls with large lettering on top.
- V shape design to be viewed from both directions of Mitchell Highway
- Native grass and tree backdrop

Trail Link
Figure 1 Anticline cave amphitheatre concept
Figure 2 Entry sign concept
Figure 3 Playground climbing equipment concept
Figure 4: Playground Fossil pit concept
Figure 5 Playground tunnel concept
Figure 6 Visitor Entry concept
### 5.3 Partnerships and Linkages

Establishing and growing partnerships and linkages with well-aligned organisations and attractions will be critical to the Wellington Caves reaching its potential as a regionally or nationally significant visitor attraction. The location and scale of the site (regional NSW, relatively small site) would normally lend itself to the site becoming a regionally significant attraction, however the discovery of the Wellington Caves Megafauna fossils, and their contribution to the development of the Theory of Evolution, and mention in the diaries of Charles Darwin, give this site broader significance and a point of interest to the scientific community worldwide.

The following suggested partnerships and regional linkages draw on some that exist already and other potential opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Partner</th>
<th>Common links / purpose of partnership</th>
<th>Proposed actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taronga Western Plains Zoo</strong></td>
<td>Megafauna – links between the zoo (live megafauna) and caves (megafauna of the past)</td>
<td>Establish school excursion streamlined itinerary with links between megafauna, evening experiences, complementary curriculum-compliant teaching resources and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leverage education market, unique accommodation, group visitor markets</td>
<td>Leverage Taronga Zoo marketing – joint social media efforts, offer to Taronga Western Plains Zoo visitors for packaged /discount cave tour rates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Money can’t buy” exclusive tour options for Zoo VIPs (opportunity to visit the caves exclusively / work with a scientist / adventure caving option (small group, by arrangement))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Longer term – establishing ‘unique accommodation’ options at the Wellington Caves site – high end premium experiences, complementary to what is offered at the Zoo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation Camp</strong></td>
<td>Leverage education market, group visitation (corporate, incentives, family groups).</td>
<td>Develop school excursion itinerary streamlined for Sport and Rec Camp visitors (accommodation options / or tour only). Possibility of evening activities. Adventure caving possibility, scientific discovery tours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complementary booking systems – streamlined to ease administrative burden for schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate training options (use of Caves meeting facilities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old Dubbo Gaol</strong></td>
<td>Council managed facility – heritage / cultural experience.</td>
<td>Offer packaged tickets, refine / promote timing of tours to enable visitors to participate in tours at both sites. Special interest group bookings – promote options at both sites (eg accessible sites), “progressive events” eg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Partner</td>
<td>Common links / purpose of partnership</td>
<td>Proposed actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Western Plains Cultural Centre</td>
<td>Exhibition of Caves art / scientific history exhibition</td>
<td>Wellington Caves display addition to Museum exhibition – possible repatriation of collection from Australian Museum or UK / US collections, rotating collection exhibits between locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Information Centres (Dubbo and Wellington)</td>
<td>Promotion and linking of Wellington Caves to other experiences within the region.</td>
<td>Ensure Wellington Caves / Megafauna content for display, regular familts, Science project updates / timelines of Wellington Caves science activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osawano Japanese Gardens</td>
<td>Promotion of pleasant experience available at the Osawano Japanese Gardens.</td>
<td>Promote linkages to other regional Japanese Gardens (Dubbo, Cowra), Botanical Gardens (Dubbo) and Arboretum (Lake Burrendong). Package events (weddings) to take place within the Japanese Gardens, with adjacent catering (Golf Club or Wellington Caves kiosk) and accommodation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town and Country Tours</td>
<td>Option to add Caves dimension to current tour products.</td>
<td>Opportunity to develop daytours from Dubbo to Wellington / Wellington Caves. VIP / dedicated tours (advanced bookings). Packaging experiences. Use of day visitor facilities / kiosk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Golf Club</td>
<td>Adjacent activity and potential dinner / drink site for Wellington Caves visitors and accommodation guests.</td>
<td>Investigate with Golf Club the potential of a commercial arrangement with caterer / community dinner coordinator to develop dining options at the Golf Club and potentially Wellington Caves Kiosk. This could be very appealing to Caves visitors and generate income for the Golf Club, maximise use of kitchen facilities. Promote ‘play and stay’ to Wellington Caves visitors (rates online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjacent local businesses</td>
<td>Add to Wellington Caves Visitor Precinct offer.</td>
<td>Coordinate opening times to give cave visitors options in between tour departures, promotion of the adjacent businesses at Cave ticket sales, and vice versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Partner</td>
<td>Common links / purpose of partnership</td>
<td>Proposed actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists and social media “influencers”</td>
<td>Encourage creative activity inspired by Wellington Caves. Art clubs, artists, local creators. Social Media influencers with connections to the Wellington region.</td>
<td>Foster a relationship with Instagram ‘influencers’ locally and further afield, and feature #WellingtonCaves Instagram images on the Wellington Caves website, and other user generated content such as Trip Advisor reviews and images. Work with interested parties to entice creative types (e.g. Artist in Residence program, followed by an Exhibition event onsite and in Sydney).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum and University research partnership</td>
<td>Continue scientific study of Wellington Caves – speleology and megafauna, hydrogeology and other aspects of the caves. Contribute to scientific knowledge, further explain the site’s scientific significance. Use knowledge to contribute to the site’s ongoing management to ensure sustainability. Enhance visitor experience through sharing scientific knowledge and develop possibilities to contribute to scientific work.</td>
<td>Establish visitor experiences based around participation in science “voluntourism”. Scientist training / sharing of project progress with guides to inform tour interpretive content and create professional development opportunities for the guiding team. Promotion of partnership / site through ‘friends of’ networks of other organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Platters initiative</td>
<td>Enhancing the visitor experience and giving local focus to the Kiosk, linking in with broader initiatives</td>
<td>When reviewing the kiosk menu and products for sale, look to incorporate a regional food and wine “100 mile diet” component – suggest country-style, seasonal hearty food, priced to offer good value for money, to suit the market and attract locals. Incorporate sale of locally produced items, similar to what is on offer at the Wellington Visitor Information Centre. Invite local wine makers / food producers to set up a ‘tasting’ opportunity during busy times – promote the region’s paddock-to-plate initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council re Old Sydney Road Cycling</td>
<td>Increasing opportunities for locals to access the site, increased range of activities for visitors</td>
<td>Work with Council to seek funds for upgrade of this route suitable for an easy cycle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 Target markets

5.4.1 Caravan and Camping market

The 2017 Caravanning and Camping Consumer Demand Report (CIAA, 2017) indicates a strong outlook for the caravan and camping market, reporting 79% of the Australian population have a ‘positive purchase intention’ towards caravan and camping holidays. Campers select a destination based on it being a ‘must see destination’, recommendations from friends and family, and being a family friendly destination.

Motivations to caravan and camp were reported as caravan and camping lifestyle, spending time with family and friends, and escaping the daily grind. Favourite activities were sightseeing, cooking outdoors and going fishing. Prior to departure 80% of campers want instant confirmation when booking online. Before booking, 79% of respondents read reviews of the caravan parks online.

For the year ending March 2017, Australia’s total domestic caravan and camping nights were recorded at 49.78 million, with 47% of the market between 30-54 years (5.5 million trips) and 55+ years 30% of total trips. However 55+ years account for 44% of all nights, reflecting their longer trips.  

Destination NSW Domestic caravan and camping travel to NSW (year ending December 2015) reported NSW received over 2.2 million domestic caravan and camping visitors, spending 10.0 million nights in NSW, and an estimated $1.8 billion during their trip. ‘Holiday’ (84.1%) and ‘VFR’ (11.8%) were the primary purpose of the NSW caravan and camping trips. Central NSW received 8.4% of caravan and camping visitors, but only 5.2% of nights, an average stay of 2.8 nights. Adult couples (37.7%) were the most common travel party, with family group (25.9%) and friends or relatives (26.9%) the next most common travel parties.

While beach-focused holidays and activities are popular with domestic caravan and camping holiday-makers, there is significant potential to grow the number of domestic caravan and camping visitors who visit central NSW.

The Greater Western Plains DMP identified numerous actions relating to the possible development of the RV market. A preliminary analysis of the region on the map of “official” RV Friendly Towns (see map below) indicates a gap in RV Friendly towns in the Dubbo and Wellington region from Molong through to Dubbo on the Mitchell Highway, and north to past Coonabarabran on the Newell Highway. Wellington could potentially fill a gap and encourage RV visitors to stop by becoming an RV Friendly town. Word of mouth promotion is significant with this market.

Dubbo Regional Council has recently undertaken a study on caravanning, camping and freedom camping within the region and further consumer insights from that study will be used to inform priority actions once the study results are available.

Figure 7 Dubbo Regional Council Camping and Freedom camping sites
5.4.2 The Education Market – primary and secondary education

To interest schools, attractions need to make a compelling offer, target the right year level and be directly linked to the Australian Curriculum. Linking the experience directly and supporting it with school year-appropriate learning materials will make the opportunity more attractive to teachers. Schools plan and book with long lead times – a year in advance is quite common, as once schools have their schedule developed to suit, they rebook as they leave.

There are approximately 690,000 students enrolled in NSW public schools within 450km of Wellington\(^6\) and approximately 41,000 students enrolled in ACT government schools\(^7\). About 35% of Australian school students attend non-government schools\(^8\), so there is likely to be another 390,000 students in this area in non-government schools. This means there is potentially over a million students within 450km of Wellington.

For most students, Wellington will be an overnight excursion and not every student goes on an overnight excursion every year. If each student experiences four overnight excursions in their school career, that would equate to about 330,000 students each year who go to school within 450km of Wellington going on overnight excursions every year.

This represents a potentially significant market, particularly if partnerships with the Taronga Western Plains Zoo and other significant regional attractions can be established. Even closer to Wellington Caves is the Lake Burrendong Sport and Recreation Camp, attracting the education market to the region. There is already some cooperation between Wellington Caves and Lake Burrendong, and there is potential to grow visitation through a strengthened partnership.

The forthcoming employment of an education officer at the Wellington Caves will assist with growing this market. Development of Australian curriculum linked resources and activities for before, during and after a visit to Wellington Caves combined with an itinerary that features the region’s educational opportunities will entice teachers. This market will be further supported in the medium – longer term by the recently funded budget-style group accommodation. A further initiative could focus on encouraging students to return with their families. Each student could be given a ‘family visit’ discount offer. Recent research identifies that children and teenagers increasingly participate in decision making / influence family holiday decisions.

5.4.3 Special interest groups

Special interest groups such as Probus clubs, Rotary clubs, 40 Plus Life Clubs, and Senior Citizens Clubs could be a source of visitors to Wellington Caves, depending on issues such as accessibility. These clubs look for opportunities to expand members’ interests and keep their minds active by organising regular bus tours to interesting locations. Group pricing and packaging with the café could grow visitation with this group.

5.4.4 Geotourism potential

The Wellington Caves, being a natural geological feature, have the potential to emphasise the site as a ‘geotourism’ destination. Geotourism is an increasingly recognised sector of the nature / ecotourism industry, promoting experiences and sites for the landscape values and natural features on display. While the size of the geotourism market is not clearly defined in Australia it is a subset of nature and ecotourism. Recent research

undertaken by Crane and Fletcher\(^9\) suggests that most cave visitors are not a part of a special interest market, rather they take the opportunity to visit an interesting site and enjoy the experience to view and learn about a cave as a part of their day / holiday. A further article on Understanding Tourist Perspectives on Geotourism (focused on the Flinders Ranges in South Australia) suggested that although geotourism experiences appeal to a small segment of the nature tourism market, those visitors can lead an increase in interest in a site, while the broader market will have their visit to a region enhanced by geo-focused experiences as a part of their broader holiday experience.

5.4.5 Geo parks and Geo trails

There is an increasing recognition of the potential of geotourism in Australia, and promotion of Geo Parks and Geo trails – featured destinations and trails that link together sites that feature geological features such as Caves. The Wellington Caves are noted on the Geomaps website (http://www.geomaps.com.au/), and there would be value in the Wellington Caves Manager actively following and where possible participating in initiatives. The Wellington Caves could be identified as a side trip in the Tour of NSW Caves Trip (http://www.geomaps.com.au/scripts/cavestrip.php). Although not all travellers would take the side trip, it would assist in building awareness of the Wellington Caves precinct amongst a well-disposed target market.

5.4.6 Conservation and Nature-based tourism

A central goal of the Wellington Caves site is the conservation of the site’s natural features, ecological and heritage values. The market for nature-based tourism in NSW is healthy, and within the Central Plains region, the Taronga Western Plains Zoo heavily draws on conservation-friendly, eco and nature-based tourism segments. The opportunity to participate in science, or learn about scientific activity being undertaken at the Wellington Caves site is a potential area for growing visitation from the nature based segment, and to enhance the experience of other visitors to the site.

Enhancing conservation and sharing conservation messages with visitors is a fundamental similarity between the Wellington Caves and Taronga Western Plains Zoo, and could be the key to establishing some cross promotion between the two sites. In addition, development of educational experiences and interpretive content for tours could look to incorporate opportunities for ‘citizen science’ – visitors could contribute to research or interact with researchers at the site.

The environmental condition and performance of the site would need to be improved to gain credibility with this group – however they would also be a resource to assist deliver an environmental improvement strategy.

5.5 Ecotourism Certification

Ecotourism Certification of the Wellington Caves tours, and the new visitor centre and accommodation facilities would underscore the Wellington Caves commitment to sustainability and high-quality visitor experiences.

Ecotourism Australia’s Eco Certification program demonstrates to consumers that tourism businesses, products and experiences have in place a commitment to sustainable practices, and that the nature-based experiences on offer are of a high quality, providing opportunities to learn about the natural environment, contribute to conservation and help the local community.

The process of achieving Eco Certification provides a useful business tool, assisting businesses to review all aspects of operations, and to make refinements to increase sustainability.

The full criteria for Eco Certification are not freely available. However, certification requires demonstrated commitments to sustainability and best practice in the following areas:

- Protection and care for the natural environment, contributing to conservation
- Interpretation – helping visitors to learn and appreciate the environment they are visiting
- Supporting local businesses and community.

These areas directly align with the stated mission, vision and objectives for the site.

The Master Plan process creates an opportunity to build sustainability principles into new developments from their inception. The proposed actions in this plan will support the Wellington Caves to achieve the above requirements.

Eco Certification is a business development tool. Through membership, you become part of a nation-wide community of leaders in ecotourism and build your network for sharing best practice and continuous improvement strategies. Along with reaping the benefits of formulating your plans and goals for the future, you also receive:

- Operator credibility and industry recognition, throughout Australia and Internationally
- Certification logos and certificates to display your achievement
- Marketing across EA’s platforms and free listing on the online Green Travel Guide searchable database
- Full membership rights with Ecotourism Australia and discounted registration for our annual Global Eco AsiaPacific Tourism Conference
- Various discounts and opportunities with EA and our industry partners (like TripAdvisor, Australian Traveller Magazine, Tourism Tribe, and many more)
- Access and eligibility for extended licences and permits through Protected Area Management Agencies
- Representation at Australian Tourism Exchange.

from www.ecotourism.org.au
6 Implementation Plan

Wellington Caves aims to be a leading example in exceptional visitor experiences that create understanding, foster appreciation and result in protection and conservation of the natural environment.

This will be achieved through:

- Providing stimulating, inspiring and innovative experiences that connect our visitors to nature and the history of the site to competitively position Wellington Caves as a “must do” tourist attraction in the Central West.
- Generating sufficient financial returns to economically thrive, with the vision to be able to invest profits generated back into enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring the conservation & continued research of the reserve.
- Minimising visitor impacts on the reserve and promote positive action to protect the natural environment and have a positive impact on the planet.

This master plan sets out the program for delivery of these objectives.

6.1 Program Management

Delivery of the recommendations contained in this master plan will involve the development and coordination of a range of partnerships, development and delivery of new education and interpretive programs, landscaping and land management upgrades and maintenance, and delivery of building upgrade and developments as well as new marketing and promotional initiatives.

This will require a program management arrangement that ensures each component progresses at the appropriate time to ensure delivery of the overall objectives. While the physical components – landscaping and building works – will be the most tangible realisation of the program the other components are essential to the successful delivery of the enhanced experience. This means project governance and management needs to maintain a balanced approach to all aspects of the program.

A Project Control Group should be formed chaired by a senior Council officer who reports direct to the General Manager. This will ensure program delivery has the profile required to ensure success. The PCG should include the Caves Manager, Advisory Committee representation as well as appropriate Council officers with expertise in the range of functions covered by the program.

A Project Manager should be appointed on a temporary basis for 2-3 years to oversight delivery of the recommended program. This officer would report to the Caves Manager on a day to day basis and be responsible to the PCG for delivery of the project. This officer should be a skilled project manager with construction experience.
6.2 Funding

To date $3.8m has been allocated towards the visitor centre and group accommodation components of the project.

Additional funds will be required and the investigation of additional funding opportunities and grant applications should be included in the duties of the project manager. A Business Case and/or feasibility analysis will be required to demonstrate the financial and regional economic benefits of the required investment. This would also assist in ensuring the existing funds are spent in the most advantageous manner during the early stages to maximise viability of the business units at Wellington Caves.

6.3 Partnerships

Partnerships with local businesses within the immediate precinct and in the local region will need to be a priority for management as these may influence the detailed design of the proposed new facilities.

Further partnerships with research institutions will help to build a base level of activity on site to give effect to the ‘research centre’ initiative and assist management in making decisions about improving the environmental condition of the site. The negotiation of further partnership agreements with academic and other institutions should be led by the Caves Manager.

Partnerships with not for profit organisations such as Conservation Volunteers Australia should be investigated as these can complement the ‘research centre’ status, contribute to improving the condition of the endangered ecological community, and build community connection to the place.

Identifying partnership opportunities and negotiating these should be led by the Caves Manager and supported by the project manager as an integral part of the site enhancement program.
7 Action Plan

This section identifies the most important actions required to deliver this master plan and achieve the outcomes desired under the stated mission, vision and objectives for the site.

7.1 Immediate actions

1. Establish a Project Control Group and identify a senior officer as project owner and recruit and appoint a project manager.

2. Confirm the minimum facility requirements for the recently negotiated partnerships with the Australian Museum and Flinders University.

3. Enter discussions with the Golf Club regarding the potential for a combined approach to market for a food and beverage operator at both sites.

4. Liaise with adjacent house/shop owners to seek their agreement to the proposed landscaping works to integrate their premises into the new approach to the site.

5. Undertake an environmental performance appraisal to determine opportunities for improving the environmental performance of site operations. Instigate a program to deliver these improvements.

6. Prepare a feasibility analysis and business case to confirm the exact scope of the initial stage of works (based on the funding already allocated by the NSW Government under the Innovation Program).

7.2 Initial stages

7. Establish a customer relations management system and develop a membership or loyalty program – potentially using a partners existing program such as the Australian Museum membership program.

8. Engage with regional marketing programs to raise the profile of Wellington Caves.

9. Investigate rebranding the site to place greater emphasis on the significance of the fossil history and ensure this message is communicated at all stages of the visitor interaction cycle.

10. Develop an integrated interpretation strategy to bring together the main stories of the site, emphasising the significant role of Wellington Caves in scientific history and the unusual formation of the caves. Use this for all messaging from on line, marketing, on site interpretation and guiding and ongoing relationship programs.

11. Develop an integrated information and marketing strategy that considers website and other social media contact with potential visitors prior to their arrival, the wayfinding and information signage on approach to the turnoff, the stories and messages on site – including guided experiences, static and other on-site interpretation, a customer relationship management system and the potential to build an ongoing relationship with the customer base.

12. Develop night time programs and package these with accommodation and meals (possibly in partnership with the Golf Club) to build a special experience for these visitors.
7.3 Stage one works

13. Prepare a design brief for the full range of proposed facilities across the whole of the site.

14. Engage a landscape architect to refine the adopted master plan scheme.

15. Procure the relevant expertise to design and construct the themed regional play space.

16. Engage an architect to prepare preliminary designs for the proposed stage one buildings.

17. Engage expertise to plan the woodland rehabilitation and potential small mammal enclosure including contacts with relevant academic institutions, Parks ACT, NSW NPWS, and conservation organisations such as Conservation Volunteers Australia.

18. Deliver the first stage of buildings and associated landscaping works.

7.4 Future stages

19. Complete the full range of broad scale landscaping, walking tracks, plantings etc. across the whole site.

20. Dependent on further funding, plan for, design and deliver initiatives such as the dormitory and luxury cabins.
References


Dawson, L, 1982. Marsupial fossils from Wellington Caves, New South Wales, the historic and scientific significance of the collections in the Australian Museum, Sydney

Records of the Australian Museum. 35:55-69
## Appendix 1. Comparative Cave Tour Products and Prices

Product 1x CAVE 2x Cave Package Adventure Caving - NOVICE School Group rate PP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>1 Cave</th>
<th>2 Cave package</th>
<th>3 cave package</th>
<th>School group rate pp</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cave</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Adult / Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenolan Caves</td>
<td>40/45</td>
<td>27/31.50</td>
<td>85/95</td>
<td>$26 / adult</td>
<td>Family 2 adults &amp; 3 school aged children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$14/child ($15 in peak time)</td>
<td>Different prices for different caves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One adult free for every 20 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarangobilly NSW</td>
<td>18 adult</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-guided cave tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 concession</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>Park entry fees apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$45 family</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naracoorte SA</td>
<td>$32/adult</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Adult (group of 10+) $27</td>
<td>Pricing of 1 hr Victoria Fossil Cave tour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$16/child</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Child $14</td>
<td>There are a variety of tours and caves including cheaper options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family $78</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capricorn QLD</td>
<td>$32 adult</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mammoth Cave self-guided audio tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$16 Child</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$80 family</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret River WA</td>
<td>$22.50 adult</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>$21 child</td>
<td>Mammoth Cave self-guided audio tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$12.50 child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mole Creek Tas</td>
<td>Adults $19.00</td>
<td>+ $24 - 39 Adult</td>
<td>+ $45/adult</td>
<td>Combo upgrade prices vary according to which tour is selected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$9.50 child</td>
<td>+ $10 Child</td>
<td>$20 child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$47.50 family</td>
<td>+ $35 – 68 family</td>
<td>+ $75 family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitomo NZ</td>
<td>$50 adult</td>
<td>+ $45/adult</td>
<td>+ $75 family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$23 child</td>
<td>$20 child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$124 family (+ $16/ extra child)</td>
<td>+ $35 – 68 family</td>
<td>+ $75 family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$47.50 family</td>
<td>+ $10 Child</td>
<td>$20 child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ $35 – 68 family</td>
<td>+ $75 family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wellington Caves Master Plan | Draft Report 18 August 2017
Appendix 2. Record of consultations

Wellington Caves Advisory Group consultation meeting 9/8/17

In attendance:

- Graham Cross – fmr Councillor, CAG : 2 issues – integrity of the caves (scientific interest, education) and business of running the site – needs to be viable but not impinge on the site values
- Greg Ryan Speleologist – cave diving here since 1985, CAG – interest in underwater sites, unique due to the formations underwater, relatively pristine. Interest in stewardship of the site & visitation.
- Ian Cooper – Speleologist, Geologist & mining engineer, structural issues and active caver. Scientific heritage, atypical formation of cave system, fossils
- Mark Griggs – Wellington Business Assoc / community member: priority is to protect, then to make economically feasible – looking for a plan: strategic – long term – branding and protection of the Caves
- Mike Augee – CAG – paleontologist, Lands Management Act changes concerning – Fossils of international significance
- Mick Wilson – DRC building consultant – conservation of the caves and site (more than just the caves), site conservation requires profitable site. Masterplan: conservation priority, followed by business
- Michael Kneipp – Council administrator – opportunity to grab the 200,000+ people driving out to Dubbo Zoo, through Wellington, each year.
- Natasha Comber – Director of Economic Development and Business

Exercise 2: identify the best aspect of the site at present (from the visitor’s perspective)

1. Exploration – opportunity to explore underground. Discovering – still unknown, still discovering – some of the answers are still mysteries
2. Great general recreation area – enjoyment of the site, even independently of the site. Nature based play, “lifesize”. Caves visit, open space, visitor experience centre. Site recreational values/open space, escaping to a peaceful setting. Mindfulness and disconnected from online, busy world, natural / mother nature’s work, natural history.
3. A local open space precinct - Variety of experiences on offer at the site and in vicinity – camping, golf course, Japanese Gardens, adjacent businesses, range of attractions. A point of difference – within the Shire, different to other cave sites. Convenient access onsite accommodation – ease of experience, proximity to ‘surface facilities’ – accommodation on site etc
5. Phosphate mine – accessibility features. Wheelchair access, convenience of the site and proximity

1830s Missionaries diaries – mentioned corroboree ground, scar trees, Capa – malevolent spirit, limited local Wiradjuri knowledge of the caves. No specific Aboriginal advisory committee on the caves.
Exercise 3: issues on site / concepts for solutions

Site entrance, connectivity and precinct flow

- Signage at entrance, need to work on appeal entrance at the carpark: tree lined entrance, separate long vehicle parking to the main car park
- Create connectivity within and surrounding site, maintain quirky entrance businesses but use signage or site design to incorporate them.
- Entrance, longer turning bays, more enticing for traffic driving by
- Visibility of a new visitor centre - sense of arrival needs to welcome and clearly draw people to the “start” of the visitor Centre.
- Integrating the precinct – links to golf course, promote the facilities adjacent (18 hole, grass) and support it as a community organisation.
- Golf course is on crown land also. New Crown Land Act – looking at what is at local / state significance
- Existing buildings need linking, reorientate café – currently Café looks out on carpark

Other suggestions

- Ticket purchase – integrate nature based theme, hide services,
- Link accommodation to day visit area – flow of the site and visitors having access and enjoyment of all. Link foot traffic to Japanese Gardens. Move motel car parks to side to connect accommodation with views – move away from traditional motel layout
- Cave half excavated needs to be completed, to allow access to a viewing platform
- Play area for day visitors, keep BBQ area

Suggestions for broader site

- Nature trail through broader area of the site, allow for night walks, need to form a path (and ensure it avoids mine shafts)
- Nature walk with views across the valley – afternoon sunset walk. Track to Gagen to link and create a loop. Increase connectivity of the site features.
- Endangered ecological community – woodland and animal and bird communities.
- Need to limit independent access to Karst issues – safety and operational concerns. But could create some opportunities to allow visitors to experience / interpret the site.
- Increase understanding of extent of karst, also need to ensure new buildings are not located on caves (geotechnical research)

Partnerships – suggestions

- Precinct businesses
- Research partnerships
- Dubbo Regional Council – Taronga Western Plains Zoos, Lake Burrandong Sport and Rec camp
Burrandong Botanical Gardens (“arboretum”)
Trail into town not on highway. Old Sydney Road – offers cyclist options for linking with Wellington township
2040 DRC Strategic Plan – support and interest in cycle trails
NSW Fossil Trail – Australian Museum – Wellington Caves “jewel in the crown” – exhibitions in Sydney, Natural History Museum in London also has fossils.
Opportunities to access Public Reserves Management Fund (Crown Land funding)

Consultation meeting # 2 – Wellington Caves Staff

Attended by Guides, Kiosk staff, Accommodation and Building Services

What is the most important thing about Wellington Caves?

- Caves / history of the caves / links into convicts, painters (Augustus Earl, Anne Marsden), geology links
- Education – sharing the knowledge and messages of conservation to encourage the site’s protection
- Caves are home to creatures large and small, from past and present. Above and below ground: heritage buildings and built environment within the caves (ropes and steps). Woodland
- Education and history – links to conservation. Linking to Everyday lives – broader conservation and environmental messages
- Fossils – big drawcard and unique
- Unique – period from Devonian – Quaternary – sea bed to present day, evidence of all on the one site
- Visitors don’t understand before they arrive what is here – various types of crystal formations, fossils,
- What’s missing, how has the world changed, bone material tells a story
- Phosphate story
- Bones were shipped elsewhere – Tasmania, Victorian Museum. People finding them now and ‘repatriation’ stories
- Caravan park – asset – often a lack of visitor awareness.
- The people – Caves team – positive attitude and deep knowledge – sharing of understanding
- Linking the fossil story with broader region and other known fossil stories, syllabus integration and resources, education centre opportunities,

Exercise 2: Identify 3 aspects of the visitor experience

- Positive experience creates memories for years to come
- Smiles – after a positive experience and when they see daylight
- Surprise – expecting a cave experience, but they are surprised by the depth of experience
- Amazing – how people feel when they finish the tour
- Understanding – grey nomads or those with less formal education, when they see the geology in situ, they understand and comprehend the site
- Informed – they leave well informed
Mind blowing – the information and being able to witness it for themselves in the caves

Wow – science – depth of scientific study of the site, live science

Issues to manage:

- Cooperation – visitors listening to safety and environmental messages / or not listening
- Touching – kids want to touch – is there a piece of crystal that can be passed around for a more interactive experience
- Climbing – kids wanting to climb on rocks (playground theme?)
- Dark – kids want to be in a cave in pitch black: opportunity to play with the lighting during the tour: complete darkness to dramatic lighting up
- Late – customers too late for a tour – pressure on front desk staff to catch it up: need self-guided opportunities to offer an alternative
- Awareness of what’s available, why the site is special
- Ignorance – visitor behaviour – physical requirements to participate in cave tours are not always understood or respected. Late arrivals – still insist on joining the tour. Option to implement a late arrival surcharge.
- Fossils and mine – a surprising element that enhances the visitor experience
- Language barrier – can make group management difficult. Signage in multi-language / symbols.
- Protect – trying to enforce protection, once they are surprised and informed they want to protect the site too
- People are highly programmed – the tours can de-stress them
- Cave system – encourage people to learn more about the system
- Empathy – guides generating empathy for the audience to give them the best possible experience
- Entry – visitors aren’t clear on where to go for tickets, accommodation, etc. Confusion
- Messenger – negative: if a tour is full, mates rates – enforcing the rules, dealing with the general public can be difficult when they are disappointed or there is a misunderstanding (if a tour is full or not running)
- Timing – 1 hour tours, however with the information available and more study occurring on site – tempting to increase the length of tour to share the information
- Access: disabled friendly access of mine tour. Need to brief people before entering the Cathedral tour
- Illustrating cave environment and behavioural management – before entering the cave.
- Virtual reality as an alternative experience?
- Need to gather more feedback while visitors are onsite - feedback form (ipad) with café discount incentive?

Exercise 3: Site planning : issues, opportunities and suggestions

- Path to Gaden Cave should start at Cathedral, and be smoother. Was meant to divert water from big sink, to stop drainage into Cathedral cave
- Interlocking pavers becoming uneven
- Fossil trail – needs constant maintenance, weed management etc,
- Public transport access to the site is lacking – transfers / shuttle? Town and country tours / taxi set fee?
Parking at Japanese Gardens – often parking on the grass beside the gardens (when carpark is not full). Need to install bollards – in wet weather the site becomes boggy and grass is damaged.

Free camping sometimes taking place near Japanese Gardens.

Walking trails – reality of managing them, residential section adjacent (privacy concerns) and cave openings create safety issues.

Opportunities: adventure caving – school groups, corporate experience, sandpit with replica fossils, flora and fauna onsite: visitor guides, planting on site, signage on types of trees / interpreting. Bush regeneration opportunities?

Repatriate the scar tree from Oxley Museum?

Opportunity to interpret human history of the region – Aboriginal through to explorers and convict settlement. Macquarie River was to be the cut off for European settlement, Dundullimore – oldest intact slab home in Australia. Links to early explorer history.

Eco-friendly initiatives – solar, water

Kiosk – central hub: update outdoor eating area so that it appeals to locals. Update playground, kids caving experience: explorer cave, megafauna,

Anti-cline cave – opportunity to create an experience. Viewing platform at the entrance. Perspex barrier. CO2 issues need to be monitored.

Remove the water tanks

Woodland on the Karst – less disturbed as it wasn’t cleared. Opportunities to interpret the environment, but need to manage access for safety and environmental issues


Audit and improve existing: Mitchell Cave. Cathedral Cave Flinders study – signage to explain. Witches hats to protect – (being looked into already).

Dogs – dog friendly Caravan Park (designated off leash areas). But no dogs on tour. Need to balance responsibilities of dog owners to be responsible with wildlife around – consider dog friendly / enclosed areas and kennels

Kiosk signage, signage of the cottage,

Group accommodation – budget style accommodation.

Road signage giving suitable lead time for drivers to make decisions

Dog day kennel

**packaging of experiences** - booking tours & accom together

Upgrading infrastructure within the caves. Minimise the impact of lighting and infrastructure

Showing conservation efforts with bats

Caves are like a mirror or a horse
Consultation meeting #3

Dubbo Regional Council Senior Officers Workshop

› Jacki Parish – Acting Manager Economic Development
› Lizzie Rich – Economic Development Project Officer
› Simon Tratt – Manager of Commercial Facilities
› Jamie Angus – Manager Business Support
› Andrew Glassop – Manager Western Plains Cultural Centre
› Mick Wilson – DRC Project Consultant
› Stephen Parish – Building Services Manager
› Jodie Anderson – Wellington Caves Manager

• Introduction from TRC Tourism
• Overview of site analysis
• Visitor insights, target markets and opportunities
• Proposed Masterplan directions
• Open discussion

Opportunity to develop multi-purpose budget accommodation (suggestion that this have the option to meet needs of family / budget traveller requirements as well as education markets. This will give maximum returns / occupancy.

Dubbo Regional Council has just undertaken a caravan and camping / RV / free camping study within the region. Results have not been adopted by Council but will be shared with TRC to assist with Master planning process.