The Transformation of Townsville

Stage 1
Research Report

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

June 2017
1. Background and scope of work 3
2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement 5
   Social and Market Research
   Snapshot of Key Strengths & Weaknesses 8
     as perceived by the Townsville Community

   2.1 Key Research Findings 9
     2.1.1 The CBD has a serious image problem. 9
     2.1.2 The Strand is well liked but hasn’t 11
          moved with the times.
     2.1.3 Nowhere appealing to swim outdoors. 12
     2.1.4 Millennials are deserting Townsville 13
          for greener pastures.
     2.1.5 A vibrant cultural community across 14
          arts and events.
     2.1.6 The Mind and Mood of the 15
          Indigenous Community.
     2.1.7 Townsville doesn’t know what 17
          it stands for.
     2.1.8 Community Role Models and Leadership. 18
     2.1.9 Classy Education Community. 18
     2.1.10 Magnetic Island is underutilised 19
          and unappreciated
     2.1.11 Townsville is a long way from becoming 21
          a serious tourism destination.
     2.1.12 Hotels are largely of uncompetitive 22
          tourism standard.
     2.1.13 Townsville airport is restraining the 22
          region’s tourism potential.
     2.1.14 Why Tourism? 23
     2.1.15 A Conundrum? 24
     2.1.16 Nonetheless, an exceptionally strong 25
          sense of community.
1. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF WORK

Tourism Think Tank is a specialist market intelligence, strategic positioning and brand development firm.

We have been retained by Townsville Council (as part of the Pure Projects multi-disciplinary team) to help develop an entirely new strategic positioning and public narrative to become the long-term foundation for implementing Council’s planned major transformation of Townsville City.

Council has made clear its objective of developing a comprehensive creative plan for transforming Townsville into a genuinely competitive, 21st century aspirational brand of quality experiences and excellence for tourism, investment, tropical living, creativity, the arts, science, education, sports, and recreation.

A simple and easily understood strategic framework (positioning), with clear community and key stakeholder buy in, is a vital pre-requisite before any development planning can begin.

The starting point in developing this essential strategy must always be the major end user - the customer.

In Townsville’s case, this means not just potential tourists, but - much more critically - engaging with, and listening intently to, the local community.

A new strategic plan to underpin Council’s planned transformation won’t succeed unless it stems naturally and authentically from the unique intrinsic character that so strongly defines the local Townsville community.

Townsville’s proposed transformation should therefore not just genuinely reflect the cultural fabric of the local community, but must be embraced by Townsville’s largest consumer market by far: its 200,000 or so local residents.

Visiting the world’s great cities is all about experiencing their unique people, their fascinating heritage, lifestyles and cultures. Not the sterile homogeneity of office buildings, or the predictable standardised ‘cookie cutter’ sameness (in both appearance and experience) of internationally branded hotels. Nor the omnipresent super-freeways, mega-airports or clichéd tourism slogans.

Tourists and out-of-town visitors today yearn for unique local experiences, for ‘cultural immersion’ into an authentically different, fascinating way of life.

For we now live in the 21st century’s Experience Economy, where “experiences are as different from services as services are from goods.” (Harvard Business Review ‘Welcome to the Experience Economy).

To experience living like a local is the most potent driver behind the timeless human condition of wanderlust, particularly for today’s millennial travellers, the largest and most demanding global tourism demographic of all.
Community buy in is the critical make-or-break of any strategic plan that proposes transformative new recreational infrastructure (and an entirely new tourism friendly image) particularly for the largely unloved physical heart of Townsville, its CBD.

Ensuring that the locals - particularly in a city with a population the size of Townsville’s - embrace that strategic plan as offering genuinely transformative, quality recreation and leisure experiences for residents and visitors alike, is critical to commercial success.

The strategic plan and the proposed new long term brand positioning simply must resonate authentically with the local community.

Accordingly, we extensively engaged with the broad Townsville community and key stakeholders from late 2016 to April 2017.
2. COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
SOCIAL & MARKET RESEARCH

Tourism Think Tank’s proposal to Townsville Council prioritised conducting social and market research while engaging with the community at large (including key leaders and stakeholders), to gather an unfiltered and comprehensive insight into:

- Key issues, feelings and thoughts (the mind and mood) of the local community regarding daily life in Townsville, and their aspirations for the future direction of the city.
- Stakeholders’ issues and feelings towards Townsville, its image (branding), its quality of life and particularly its economic and tourism potential.
- The views of Councillors, Council committees and Council leadership on the key community issues, challenges and opportunities confronting Townsville, and their ensuing vision, ideas and policies for successfully transforming the city.

We conducted lengthy in-depth discussions and interviews with multiple Townsville groups and individuals, receiving unusually frank - often disarmingly candid - responses.

Interviews included many of Townsville’s acknowledged community leaders, business advocacy bodies and professional associations, indigenous leaders, major government agencies, the local media, the large visual arts, performing arts and cultural events communities, the professional and lifestyle sports communities, tertiary education leaders, major property owners and major investors.

We also paid heed to taxi drivers, so often seen as providing a reliable ‘litmus test’ of the street mood of Australia’s local communities.

We were mindful of prioritising the reality of Townsville’s significantly younger population, which at a median age of 33.5 years, compares with the Queensland median of 36.9 years. (ABS Labour Force Survey 2015)

“The first glimpse at the 2016 census data has revealed the typical Australian is a 38-year-old married mother of two who lives in a three-bedroom house, which she owns with a mortgage.”

(The Australian 11th April 2017)

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are predominantly female with a current average age of just 23 years.”

Consequently, our qualitative (attitudinal) market and social research also included unstructured focus group discussions and multiple one-on-one interviews with young (mostly self-employed) millennial working men and women and university students from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, marital status and occupations. The male/female mix was 50/50.
Community and Stakeholder groups consulted

Our research also included often lengthy, invariably animated dialogue with a wide array of local citizens and key stakeholder groups, including *inter alia*:

- AECOM
- Ann Roberts School of Dance
- Aspect8
- Australian Festival of Chamber Music
- Airport frontline staff
- Jennifer Bott AO
- Brazier Motti
- Dance North
- Emanate Legal
- Fantasea Cruising
- Full Throttle Theatre Company
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
- 1RAR
- BARRIER Reef Orchestra
- La Luna Arts
- Griffin Group/The Hive
- Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba people
- Harbour Master
- Honeycombe
- James Cook University
- Juniper Group
- Museum of Tropical Queensland
- Magnetic Island Ferry operator workers and management
- Northern Management Group
- NQ Hospitality
- Pellegrini Group
- Pop Up Food Trucks Townsville
- Radio 4TO
- Reef HQ
- Restaurateurs
- Sealink
- The NQ Cowboys
- The Ville Resort & Casino
- Townsville Taxi drivers
- Townsville City Image Advisory Committee
- TheatreNQ
- The Townsville Bulletin
• Think Commercial
• Tourism Australia
• Townsville City Council – Ranging from the Mayor, CEO and Councillors to departmental heads and members
• Townsville Enterprise Limited, Board and Management
• Townsville Port Authority
• Townsville Yacht Club
• Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA), Townsville Branch
• Umbrella Studios

These in-depth discussions (spanning group consultations, focus groups, multiple one-on-one interviews, spontaneous street discussions, emails and phone conversations) have uncovered strongly expressed, key recurrent themes that speak unusually powerfully of the feelings of the community towards Townsville and its aspirations and concerns for their City.
SNAPSHOT OF KEY STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES
AS PERCEIVED BY THE TOWNSVILLE COMMUNITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong community passion and sense of belonging</td>
<td>CBD has a serious image problem – Locals don’t go to the CBD to shop or spend time. Disconnect between CBD and suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrant arts/cultural community</td>
<td>Townsville has little reputation as a tourist destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Strand is a very well-liked precinct.</td>
<td>Rock Pool is dirty and isolated from shops and cafes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong reputation as an education community. TVS ‘has intellectual grunt’</td>
<td>Airport presents poorly and is totally uncompetitive with Qld’s major tourism airports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Thurston the most inspirational community leader to young people.</td>
<td>Starved of events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very strong sporting community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Flinders Street bars/cafes are well liked by younger people</td>
<td>Strongly criticised as being badly lit and unsafe at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families enjoy end-of-day relaxing together at Stocklands</td>
<td>Surprisingly low visitation to Magnetic Island by locals. Ferry trips seen as expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Street shops are a microcosm of what CBD retail could be</td>
<td>Young people bored and disenchanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laid back, friendly and casual people.</td>
<td>Poor food and beverage culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1 Key Research Findings

2.1.1 THE CBD HAS A SERIOUS IMAGE PROBLEM.

Finding anybody with kind words to offer about Townsville’s CBD was almost impossible.

There was a near total absence of positive community feelings or commentary about the CBD from all ages, genders, occupations, status and socio-economic backgrounds.

At a very specific, niche level, there were positive comments from young people about some of the few new developments, such as City Lane’s Shaw and Co.

But negative views and harsh words overwhelmed, and were common to almost all interviewees.

They did not hold back:

Each verbatim comment is from different individual community members, including well known identities and major stakeholders.

‘If you took the Strand and the Cowboys out we wouldn’t live in Townsville.’

‘I can’t see any reason why people would want to come here unless they lived here.’

‘Townsville city is Brownsville city.’

‘I never take the kids to the CBD. Nowhere free to park. Hot and uncomfortable. Long distances to walk. Retail nowhere near as good as the malls in the suburbs.’

‘The City has no real CBD feel. It’s devoid of people and commercial or retail activity.’

‘The centre of the city is not the CBD.’

‘Cruise ship visitors come into this coffee shop (in the CBD) and ask Where’s the CBD?’

‘My wife shops at Stocklands. Loves Myer. She would never go to the CBD to shop.’

‘The CBD’s hot and awful.’

‘I’ve never been shopping in the city. Go to Stocklands instead.’

‘Families enjoy going to Stocklands to get free parking, air conditioning, an affordable bite to eat, a safe place for the kids and to relax with friends.’
Not one woman who participated in focus groups had ever been shopping at the CBD.

‘Not much nightlife in Townsville.’

‘Flinders St is the only place in the City to hang out with mates.’

‘But Cannon Park is the main hang-out for us. Go to the movies and eat there.’

‘Shaw and Co’s at City Lane is the go in the City, but it’s really dark outside. Badly lit. Unsafe. A worry.’

‘A lot of theft in the City. Don’t feel safe outside at night. Walk outside and you instantly lose the atmosphere.’

‘The CBD should be the hub for the community. They completely avoid it.’

‘No public transport.’

‘The City’s a mess. It’s ugly. Odd. Weird. Too spread out. Looks like someone picked up pieces of concrete stuff and just threw them down at random.’

Townsville’s CBD clearly has little emotional connection with the local community.

They don’t see it as fulfilling any enriching role in their lives and, other than the appeal to millennials of the bars in Flinders St at night, it offers few of the prized unique experiences that are craved globally by locals and tourists alike. From escaping the daily humdrum, to seeking out local crafts and wares in interesting shops, exploring art galleries, people-watching, being entertained, live music, tasting fresh local produce, good coffee and so on.

They are consequently neither proud of the CBD nor frequent it. The overwhelming impression from a visitor is one of almost bizarre emptiness: little pedestrian traffic, closed shops and many ‘SALE’ signs outside largely unpatronised retail stores.

It has almost no vernacular tropical architecture (concrete brutalism is the prevailing theme) or aspirational character, other than the few (mostly unoccupied) heritage buildings.

The sense of vibrant place, buzzing with happy cosmopolitan people, green, shady and lush with plenty of al fresco cafes and attractive shops - such as Cairns Esplanade, Noosa or Hamilton Island or Brisbane’s James Street and Eat Street – is eerily absent.

The one nearby exception is Gregory Street by The Strand, which was widely complimented as offering a consistent quality ‘shopping, food and coffee’ experience with a strong boutique retail culture.

In stark contrast to the CBD, Gregory Street presents as an attractively landscaped, colourful, tourist-friendly al fresco strip.
Implication:

If the locals shun the CBD, so too will the tourists. Get the locals back, and eventually the tourists will follow.

However, there is inarguably much transformative redefining, repositioning, rebuilding and relaunching work to be done before that desired outcome can ever be achieved.

2.1.2 THE STRAND IS WELL LIKED BUT HASN’T MOVED WITH THE TIMES.

Common to all community discussions was a positive and complimentary attitude towards The Strand as a well-liked and well-patronised recreational precinct.

The Strand is inarguably established as a meaningful and valued Townsville recreational brand.

However, this is largely in the context of its attractive tropical landscaping, clean beaches and potential, rather than being an all-encompassing ‘experience rich’ destination that consistently entertains and meets (or exceeds) the recreational wants of the local community.

‘Love the Strand. But needs to provide heaps more things to do.’

There was a widespread, very strongly expressed opinion that The Strand is lacking in regular recreational activities and events across sporting, leisure, music, events and culture.

‘It’s a great place to walk the dogs after work. It’s beautiful. But there’s absolutely no entertainment. And all the restaurants close around 8:30 or 9pm.’

‘The Strand is getting old now. It hasn’t changed in donkey’s years; hasn’t moved with the times, unlike the Cairns Esplanade which is buzzing at night with people everywhere, and stays open till late.’

‘Cairns Esplanade is an amazing place. Even has a new open-air stage nearby for live music.’

There was further strongly expressed frustration and disappointment from the large active sports participating community regarding the removal/prohibition of water-based activities along the Strand foreshore, including hiring stand-up paddle boards, canoes, kayaks, kite surfing etc.
'If you try kite surfing on the Strand, the water police will kick you off.'

Likewise, families and couples expressed cynicism and disappointment about not being able to enjoy a glass of wine on The Strand foreshore.

‘You’re not even allowed to bring a bottle of wine to a picnic on The Strand. Council officers and police move you on.’

‘There are far too many silly killjoy restrictions along The Strand.

Nanny state. Can’t even have a glass of wine. It’s ridiculous.’

‘There’s no café culture or even ice cream vendors. Nothing caters for the tourist.’

‘They even stopped the rickshaw man from operating. He was very popular, but they cancelled his permit.’

‘But the bones are there in The Strand. The beaches are better than Cairns… the seawater’s cleaner’.

Prominent business identity and owner of the Ville Resort Casino, Chris Morris, reiterated the importance of the city focusing its efforts on the Strand to capitalise on its fabulous sea views, in a speech at a Redefining Townsville event in 2016.

As reported in ‘Townsville’s 10 Most Influential People’ http://media.news.com.au/multimedia/2016/townsville-influential/top10-1/index.html Morris urged authorities to consider developing a large new swimming and water park that would attract significantly more locals and tourists.

2.1.3 NOWHERE APPEALING TO SWIM OUTDOORS.

While there is a significant existing rock pool swimming area, there was clear consensus that it is too isolated, and generally unappealing from an aesthetic, comfort (no shade) and cleanliness point of view.

Over the course of our visits to Townsville, we never saw more than a handful of people using the rock pool at any one time. It had a general feeling of little popularity, an observation strongly reinforced by community and stakeholder commentary.
‘The rock pool is ugly and dirty. It’s slippery on the bottom. Only cleaned once a week…it’s emptied out and gernied. Some people wash in it.’

‘It’s dirty and slimy. Clean seawater is only let in once a week. Disgusting. I recently saw a nappy floating in it. I won’t let the kids swim there.’

Parents particularly lamented the lack of protective shading and general amenity surrounding the rock pool. The poor connectivity with The Strand’s cafes to get a simple lunch for the kids and a “good coffee” was a universal complaint.

‘Not being able to swim in the ocean is a problem. When you’re hot, you need a swim. But I don’t like the rock pool. It’s not clean water. There’s no shaded areas near the pool and nowhere to buy a coffee or a snack.’

‘The Strand is good. But the rock pool is too far from cafes. I have to take the car just to get something for the kids to eat.’

2.1.4
MILLENNIALS ARE DESERTING TOWNSVILLE FOR GREENER PASTURES.

When conducting focus groups with Townsville’s Millennials (the Generation Y cohort, born between 1980 and 1997, currently aged between 20 and 37) we asked each participant where they thought they’d be living in ten years’ time.

“Millennials have grown to recently become the largest generational cohort in Australia, with 4.9 million people, eclipsing Gen X (4.8 million) and Baby Boomers (4.1 million), Roy Morgan Australia says.”
Australian Financial Review May 17, 2017

Not one person unequivocally said ‘Townsville’:

‘Wouldn’t want to be stuck here.’

‘I won’t be here in ten years. Will be on the Gold Coast or Brisbane.’

‘There are nicer places down south, with plenty more things to do than here… day and night.’

‘The Sunshine Coast is where I’ll be. Great beaches, great surf and heaps of cool things to do.’

‘I like this place but I’d rather be in Brisbane.’

‘Five years, yes. Ten years probably not, even though I was born and raised here.’
'When I graduate from JCU this year I’ll move elsewhere. I was born here and Mum and Dad live here. But it’s far too quiet in Townsville for me, and there’s not enough career opportunities.'

For Townsville’s younger Millennials, the lack of youth oriented ‘cool’ experiences to draw them into the City presented as a significant issue.

As previously noted, Townsville has an unusually young 33.5 year old median age demographic for a major city, with 14,000 plus students at James Cook University alone. (We are uncertain of the number of CQU’s 35,000 state-wide students enrolled at the Townsville campus).

Their disenchantment with being bored in Townsville dominated discussions with local millennials. Who, in common with millennials worldwide, endlessly seek the ‘here and now’ instant gratification of plunging into exciting new ‘Instagram moment’ experiences with their peer group.

They complain of having to travel to Cairns, the Gold Coast and Brisbane for the valued experience of big-name, headline music events.

‘Why not Townsville? There’s nothing to do here!’
‘There’s nothing to do at the top of Castle Hill. Can’t even buy a drink.’
‘Nothing happens in Townsville after 10pm. The only place that stays open late is Oliver Brown.’

‘Townsville is starved of events. People are hanging out for things to do.’

The strength of community pride and belonging that was voiced amongst older community groups and stakeholders was largely absent in the focus groups and consultations conducted with Townsville’s millennials.

2.1.5 A VIBRANT CULTURAL COMMUNITY ACROSS ARTS AND EVENTS.

In contrast to the experience of Townsville’s younger citizens, we witnessed a thriving, well organised, very strong visual and performing arts sector within Townsville, with quality performances, festivals and cultural events catering to children, families and mature demographics.

Wide ranging discussions with representatives from the Townsville arts community assembled in Umbrella Studios unearthed intense passion, talent and commitment to expand Townsville’s cultural capabilities and events.
However, common to the discussions with both cultural stakeholders and the broader community was the despairing of the serious lack of appropriate spaces and quality venues to hold performances and events, along with transport solutions to service these locations.

‘We have a major capacity problem for events in Townsville.’

‘Severely constrained in our capacity to grow because of lack of event spaces.’

‘Very real need for transport solutions.’

‘The City is lacking quality venues that can bring cultural events to life. The necessary infrastructure doesn’t exist. The customer experience just isn’t there.’

‘The Civic Theatre is constantly booked out and in a shabby location. A new theatre is crucial.’

‘Even weddings over 100 people are very difficult to stage, due to the lack of venues.’

Beyond the capacity issues, there is a clear sense of frustration at the degree of under-appreciation of the imperative role that arts and culture play in defining a city’s identity, and their intrinsic appeal to local, global and tourist audiences alike.

‘There is a very strong local arts community that is unappreciated.’

‘Council has an obligation to do something culturally transformational and lead by example.’

‘There needs to be a significant attitude shift within Townsville. People are just starting to understand the value and benefits of cultural initiatives.’

‘There needs to be some strong visionary voices supporting the arts within the Community.’

2.1.6 THE MIND AND MOOD OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY.

To the visitor, Townsville has little visible evidence of the commercial indigenous tourism that is so strongly present in Queensland’s major tourism cities and regions.

The Gold Coast has the thriving Yugambeh museum and the Yugambeh people’s Corroboree attraction at Dreamworld theme park, visited by over one million people yearly.

Cairns has its Tjapukai Aboriginal Culture Park, opened in 1987 and is the largest employer of indigenous Australians in the country.
Since 2009, the very successful annual Cairns Indigenous Art Fair has been hosted, and there is a myriad of well patronised quality Indigenous art and craft galleries in the prime tourist retail heart of the Cairns CBD.

Port Douglas has long had similarly attractively presented and very successful indigenous galleries.

Nearby, the attractive new Mossman Gorge eco-tourism Centre, operated by the Kuku Yulangi people, offers high quality indigenous experiences and guided Dreamtime walks through Mossman Gorge, which is within the region’s world heritage listed Wet Tropics rainforest.

By contrast, Townsville’s indigenous Cultural Centre - in a highly visible Flinders St river frontage location - has been permanently closed and locked up, presenting an unfortunately forlorn image of aboriginal culture to passers-by. We could not find evidence of any other commercial indigenous activity in the CBD.

Our engagement with members of the Gurambilbarra Wulgurukaba community revealed highly articulate and strong leadership, willingly forthcoming with strong views about the role and present status quo of aboriginal culture in Townsville.

‘There’s no evident aboriginal signage, unlike Cairns. There’s not a lot of public empathy for the indigenous community, and not many people in the region willing to step up and help.’

‘Welcome to Country is the exception not the rule in public events here.’

‘Eddie Mabo’s grave was desecrated’

‘There’s heaps of indigenous tourism in Cairns, but Townsville’s a mining and ports place, not a tourism town.’

‘The now closed Cultural Centre was not representative of our community. It represented one family only. A disgrace.’

‘Indigenous kids complain there’s absolutely nothing to do. And their own culture is not distilled into them. Many don’t see a future in Townsville, other than football.’

HOWEVER

‘The mood is hopeful and improving.’

‘JT does such a lot, and the Cowboys’ Learn Earn Legend! indigenous education and careers program is a great thing.’

There was a strong view that Townsville should be training and employing aboriginal tour guides around the city, such as is done elsewhere in Queensland.


2.1.7
TOWNSVILLE DOESN’T KNOW WHAT IT STANDS FOR.

Getting a clear picture of Townsville’s identity from community and stakeholders was unanimously ambiguous and vague.

There was consensus that Townsville was unclear about what it wanted to be as a city, both to its local community and to the broader visitor market. The absence of a strong brand identity (particularly for tourism) extended across the breadth of age and demographic cohorts.

‘What’s the voice of Townsville? Where’s its unique identity?’

‘What does Townsville stand for? What’s its personality?’

More than a few volunteered the opinion that Townsville was a bland and meaningless name and the word ‘Towns’ confused international visitors.

‘We should change Townsville’s name to compete with more touristy names like Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, The Whitsundays etc’

‘Tourists don’t seem to know the Great Barrier Reef is accessible from here. There’s none of the Reef hype or Reef tourism trip operators of Cairns.’

‘Everybody knows Cairns as the Reef and Rainforest tourism town.’

‘Townsville doesn’t know what it wants to be.’

‘There’s no food and beverage culture, and shabby customer service standards.’

‘Townsville’s locked into hanging on to the way it was done 30 years ago. Hasn’t moved with the times. Won’t innovate, won’t change, won’t get into social media.’

‘Rotary is the best example of the problem.’

‘Townsville has a very inward focus.’

‘Customer service is crap everywhere, especially compared to Cairns.’

‘Townsville needs to behave like a big city, but it’s just a big country town.’ (A frequently repeated theme by all demographics)

‘It’s a mining and ports city, not a tourism city.’
'Every few weeks the live cattle export ship comes into the port and stinks the entire city out.'

'Where's the homage to Townsville's architectural history?'

Townsville’s beginning to pick up. It’s starting to feel like it’s getting better.'

### 2.1.8 COMMUNITY ROLE MODELS AND LEADERSHIP.

Across all community groups and genders, Jonathan Thurston was spontaneously nominated (unprompted) as Townsville’s most admired community identity.

Some older people were occasionally ambivalent, but to Townsville’s crucial millennials, there was not one dissenting view.

To Townsville’s indigenous community, JT is a shining beacon of inspiration, hope and pride.

A handful of other identities were named as leadership role models, viz:

-'Jenny Hill has done good things. She’s very personable and a local. Wants to do good stuff but she’s hampered by other people.'

-'Les Walker is strongly committed, a local, and a really good bloke’

-'Laurence Lancini is a visionary, has done great things with the Cowboys, and developed City Lane, which is our city hang out.’

-'Need some young blood leaders.’

There was no spontaneous mention of leadership from the academic sector, the science and research community (such as AIMS, CSIRO & GBRMPA), or the Arts, the medical community or the military. Such was the dominance of the admiration for Jonathan Thurston from nearly all interviewees.

It is, of course, not remotely unusual for Australians to regard famous sporting personalities as their community heroes. Seldom can our scientists, surgeons or scholars hope to achieve the same mass public awareness and enduring acclaim as our Don Bradmans.

### 2.1.9 CLASSY EDUCATION COMMUNITY.

Undoubtedly, both James Cook and Central Queensland Universities bring considerable academic sophistication and gravitas to Townsville.

The quality of their education offering, the size of their campuses and the calibre of the leadership all reflect an exceptional educational tourism opportunity.
There is a widely-acknowledged culture of academic excellence and talent within the Universities, which clearly must be accessed for this transformative task for the benefit of the broader Townsville community and, in due course, for tourism.

Townsville’s primary and secondary schools are also held in very high repute by the community.

‘We moved to Townsville because of the high quality secondary schools for our daughter. Her school is terrific, but we’ll move to Brisbane once she graduates from Uni. There’s far better job opportunities and lifestyle for all of us there.’

2.1.10
MAGNETIC ISLAND IS UNDERUTILISED AND UNAPPRECIATED.

Despite its extraordinary natural beauty and proximity to Townsville, Magnetic Island seems very much “off the radar” for much of the Townsville community.

There are very low levels of visitation from the locals, even those in senior employment roles with good salaries. Once a year or less is common. Comments from our research highlight this sporadic frequenting of Magnetic Island - or “Maggie” as universally referenced by the locals:

‘Maggie’s a nice place but there’s absolutely nothing to do.’

‘It’s a shame, but Maggie’s gone downhill. It’s not promoted and there’s nothing cool to do there since they banned The Full Moon parties.’

‘Been to Maggie twice in my whole life.’

‘Been to Maggie five times in twenty five years.’

‘Might visit Maggie once or twice a year.’

‘I’ve been to Maggie three times in ten years.’

‘The Ferries are very expensive. Costs around $200 to take the family and the car over for the day’
Broader recognition of the immense unrealised potential of Magnetic Island has nonetheless recently caught the attention of private developers, the Queensland Government, the national media and, very significantly, Trip Advisor.

Trip Advisor’s 2017 Travellers Choice Awards for ‘Australia’s Top Ten destinations’ voted Magnetic Island in an unprecedented Number 5 position…ahead of Noosa (6), Margaret River (7), Port Douglas (8), Exmouth (9), and Airlie Beach (10).


Recent media coverage of a standout home on Magnetic Island in the Sydney Morning Herald & Melbourne Age Weekend Editions illustrated Maggie’s striking natural beauty and its quality pockets of pared back sophistication, further reinforcing the unrealised major tourism potential this jewel of an island represents for Townsville.

**Implication:**

This outstanding recent global publicity represents a totally unprecedented opportunity to capitalise on Magnetic Island’s unrealised tourism (and local visitation) potential.

That ‘right-here-right-now’ opportunity for Townsville must not be lost, and leveraging the huge free-kick of this totally unexpected and exceptional publicity needs to be cleverly, creatively and (above all) swiftly implemented.

We also strongly recommend that Council prioritises addressing the current planning codes and zoning (and lack of essential road and water services) applicable to development on Magnetic Island.

It has been drawn to our attention that these codes and regulations are preventing development of the type of appropriate high quality, low impact eco-resorts that are now so vitally necessary to compete for quality tourism (and increased local visitation) for any Great Barrier Reef Island, let alone such an unspoilt, underused and highly rated environmental jewel as Magnetic Island.

Magnetic Island, spectacularly beautiful though it is, remains significantly uncompetitive in its quality and scale of resort experience offering, compared to nearby islands, cities and villages in the Queensland tropics as well as Fiji, New Zealand, Bali and Hawaii (even the Maldives, which is experiencing dramatic tourism growth).

All of which are hugely popular holiday destinations for Australians, with very high levels of repeat visitation.
2.1.11
TOWNSVILLE IS A LONG WAY FROM BECOMING A SERIOUS TOURISM DESTINATION.

‘Townsville’s tourism numbers haven’t really moved in 20 years.’ (TEL)

Apart from the difficulties for tourism posed by the profound disconnect between the local community and the unloved CBD, Townsville has the inherent disadvantage of being a very long way from anywhere, particularly Queensland’s major tourism regions.

It’s a four-and-a-half-hour drive from Cairns, and over three hours from Airlie Beach and the Whitsundays.

Townsville is therefore far from a logical ‘add on’ destination for the vast majority of tourists to Cairns and the Whitsundays. Or frankly from any tourism destination in Queensland.

Hence the importance of Grey Nomad and Drive tourism to Townsville.

‘Townsville tourism is 85% to 90% local Drive tourism.’ (TEL)

The proven dictum for commercially sustainable tourism success is that the destination must be no more than an hour’s drive from a major tourism airport, with regular multiple daily direct services from the major carriers to the capital cities.

Cairns, the Gold Coast, Hamilton Island and Noosa enjoy that huge advantage, with upmarket Port Douglas (just under one hour’s drive from Cairns) being the most northerly major tourism destination in Queensland.

The following extract from an unsolicited email received in 2016 from a bright young Millennial male Magnetic Island ferry worker (raised on the island, and with whom we engaged on the ferry ride) is a poignant expression of Townsville’s tourism dilemma.

‘Is there anything to see or do between Cairns and Airlie Beach?’

“It doesn’t take long to browse through social media, travelling blogs and Trip Advisor to see why Holiday Makers love our northern and southern cousins so much.

In Cairns the reef is more accessible & a lot more cost effective, they have a competitive dining scene and the Daintree Rainforest is just a stone’s throw away.

Airlie Beach, the ‘doorstep’ to the Whitsundays is another town driven by tourism, having competitive dining experiences, a great night life and a bucket list of North Queensland experiences on offer.

The reason I started with the question ‘Is there anything to do between Cairns and Airlie beach’ is because this was a question I was asked by a group of travellers last year whilst dining out in Cairns. They had a perceived idea that there was nothing on offer in Townsville that they couldn’t experience north or south of us at a more cost effective rate.
Now growing up on Magnetic Island it was disheartening to hear that these travellers thought so little of such an amazing and unique location, although after a little research into what was on offer online, I slowly began to realise why!”

“I’ll be the first to admit that I’m not an expert in tourism nor what it takes to increase economic growth, but I am passionate about Townsville and tourism on Magnetic Island. I think you will be surprised by what the younger generation has to say about what this city needs.”

2.1.12 HOTELS ARE LARGELY OF UNCOMPETITIVE TOURISM STANDARD.

‘Townsville’s hotel sector’s bread and butter is corporate and mining customers, with an average occupancy of 60%’

The highest quality hotel is the 4 star The Ville Resort Casino. By and large, the remainder are serviced apartments, are uncompetitive in quality with hotels at key Tropical North Queensland tourism destinations, such as Cairns, Port Douglas and Hamilton & Hayman Islands, and offer inferior guest experiences and facilities.

2.1.13 TOWNSVILLE AIRPORT IS RESTRAINING THE REGION’S TOURISM POTENTIAL.

‘Townsville’s dated airport facilities make it very difficult to attract major international airlines.’

John O’Sullivan, Tourism Australia CEO

Townsville airport is in dire need of major 21st century standard quality repositioning, rebuilding and relaunching if it is to seriously compete for tourism business, especially Australia’s high yield international tourist market.

Exactly as the recently rebuilt Cairns, Gold Coast and Canberra airports have done.

Townsville airport is of uncompetitive customer-experience quality, with only one inadequate and cramped domestic Frequent Flyer lounge and ageing terminal facilities, both airside and landside.
‘The airport is pretty ugly. Needs a lot of work. Not a nice way to introduce people to this place. I’m embarrassed to pick up visitors from there, and then have to drive them right past the jail on the way into town.’

‘Cairns airport is really nice.’

Canberra airport’s success at the Qantas National Tourism Awards in February 2017 is a perfect case study of how an entirely new, passenger friendly, high quality 21st century standard terminal and supporting facilities can deliver direct international flights to regional Australian cities.

2.1.14 WHY TOURISM?

There was no spontaneous discussion from the community on tourism, and there is clearly no common feeling or perception that Townsville is a meaningful tourism destination.

This is in great contrast to Cairns, where the community consciousness of its overwhelmingly tourism-centric economy is profound, and on significantly highly visible and permanent 24/7 display in every part of the city - from its attractive, recently rebuilt 21st century airport (currently rated 7th of the world’s Top Ten Small Airports) to the bustling Cairns CBD, Esplanade and waterfront, to the well patronised tour desks in nearly every hotel, selling as many as 600 tours and attractions.

Townsville’s new positioning strategy must embrace the huge future opportunity that Australia’s dramatically growing, high yield tourism sector is bringing to the country, to the profound long-term, sustainable benefit of Queensland’s major tourism centres.

Over 5 million passengers pass through Cairns Airport each year, compared to 1.58 million passengers (2016 FY) for Townsville Airport.

Cairns enjoyed total passenger arrivals for the 12 months to 31st March 2017 of approximately 2.1 million domestic visitors (up 3.1%) and 330,000 international visitors (up 9.5%). It should be noted that many international visitors fly to Cairns on domestic flights.

Strong growth in Australia’s international and domestic visitor numbers has meant that tourism and travel is by far the largest and fastest growing major discretionary consumer market in the Australian economy.

Tourism is also Australia’s largest services export.

Total international visitor and domestic tourism expenditure grew by 9% to a record $116.7 billion in 2016 (60% domestic, 40% international), which was more than three times the 2.5% growth recorded for the Australian economy as a whole.
International visitor numbers to Australia in 2016 grew at an unprecedented 11%, nearly three times the growth rate of total global international travel of 3.9%.

Average expenditure per capita in Australia by each international visitor is approximately $5,000, which is the highest in the developed world.

Domestic tourism numbers continued the buoyant growth of the past 5 years, posting a 4.85% gain on 2015, also significantly outperforming Australia’s GDP growth.

Domestic holiday travel grew by 8.2% in 2016, compared to a 7.1% decline in Queensland mining related travel.

(All data sourced from Tourism Research Australia, Deloitte Access Economics, Townsville Airport and Cairns Airport)

### 2.1.15 A CONUNDRUM?

The reality is that, for generations, Townsville has been one of Australia’s largest government based/government dependent regional cities.

It encompasses, inter alia:

- Lavarack Barracks, Australia’s largest Army base
- The substantial RAAF base
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA);
- The Australian Institute for Marine Science (AIMS);
- CSIRO;
- James Cook University
- Central Queensland University
- TAFE
- Townsville’s major 580 bed public hospital (with the largest Emergency Department in Queensland)
- Decentralised state government departments and agencies
- Townsville Council, the Stuart Correctional Centre and so on.

**AND CONSEQUENTLY:**

‘Every second employed person in Townsville gets a cheque from the government every 2 weeks, and couldn’t give a damn about tourism or changing the place.’ (Townsville investor)
2.1.16

NONETHELESS, AN EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

Despite the harsh grumbling of the community about Townsville’s perceived and real problems, there is a quite extraordinary sense of community belonging, passion and pride.

While it is less apparent with the younger community and millennials, they still voice a consistent wish to be proud of Townsville.

Very unexpectedly, there was a remarkable lack of unprompted community comment or complaint about Townsville’s post mining boom economic downturn, other than from taxi drivers.

Millennials invariably expressed the pragmatic need to move from Townsville to secure better job opportunities and social ‘action’, but their wish to be proud of Townsville remained, with many expressing the view that “things were getting better.”

When asked, none could accurately state Townsville’s 11% unemployment rate, let alone the 21.8% youth unemployment rate.

Community leaders and key stakeholders to taxi drivers were as one in describing the Townsville community as uniquely easy-going, laidback, authentically friendly and welcoming.

Townsville people are invariably said to be ‘real people’, consistent with their affectionately embraced heritage as ‘a big country town.’

Cairns, by contrast, has a far more transient tourism-centric economy, with nothing like the depth of passion or sense-of-place, of ‘belonging,’ that so uniquely characterises Townsville’s citizens.

Effectively capturing and leveraging this uniquely authentic strength of community spirit is almost certainly the most significant opportunity - with the greatest long-term potential - to successfully underpin Council’s bold strategic vision for redefining, repositioning and relaunching a dramatically transformed 21st century Townsville.