

ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

May 21, 2025

ITEM 13BROKEN HILL CITY COUNCIL REPORT NO. 109/25

SUBJECT: DRAFT LIVING DESERT MASTER PLAN AND ASSOCIATED
DRAFT LIVING DESERT PLANS FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION
D25/22541

Recommendation

1. That Broken Hill City Council Report No. 109/25 dated May 21, 2025, be received.
2. That That Council endorse the Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan for public exhibition.
3. That the Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan be placed on public display for 28 days in accordance with legislation.
4. That Council receives a further report at the conclusion of the exhibition period, outlining submissions and feedback received and any recommended changes, with a view to adopting the Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan.

Executive Summary:

Broken Hill City Council is the appointed land manager of the Living Desert State Park, a 2,400-hectare area established in the 1990s. The Park was created with the aim to:

- Support conservation through a captive breeding program for endangered regional species.
- Provide a site for environmental education.
- Enhance tourism by encouraging overnight stays in Broken Hill.
- Generate local employment, education, and training opportunities.

The Living Desert State Park has since developed into a significant conservation, cultural, recreational and tourism asset. It serves as a:

- Biodiversity conservation site for semi-arid flora and fauna.
- Recreational area for residents.
- Major tourist attraction integrating Broken Hill's key tourism themes: art, the outback, and nature.
- Site of First Nations people cultural significance.

The Living Desert State Park attracts approximately 40,000 visitors annually, making it one of the City's most frequented destinations. The key features of the Living Desert State Park include:

- *Living Desert Sculptures*: 12 iconic sandstone artworks, created by artists from around the world in 1993, with panoramic views, especially popular at sunset.
- *The John Simons Flora and Fauna Sanctuary*: A 180-hectare fenced conservation zone established in 2002, with trails, arboretum, and public art.
- *Picnic Area*: Offers public amenities and access to sites of First Nations people occupation.

- *Starview Campsite*: Primitive camping with caravan and tent sites, night sky viewing, and basic facilities.
- *Sundown Nature Trail*: 2.8 km walking loop offering scenic exploration of the Sundown Hills.
- *Management*: Overseen by Council Rangers with support from community volunteers.

Over the years, development within the Living Desert State Park has occurred incrementally, as funding and resources became available. Council has recognised the need for a cohesive, long-term strategic planning framework to guide the future use, development, and management of the Living Desert State Park. This approach integrates:

- Cultural and tourism enhancements.
- Visitor experience and economic sustainability.
- Conservation objectives.
- First Nations heritage and collaborative management.

Report:

In January 2024 Council advertised Q22/73 - Request for Quotation - Living Desert State Park Master Plan, with the intention to engage a suitably experienced consultant to develop a 20-year Master Plan for the Living Desert State Park.

The aim of the Master Plan was to outline the actions required for improvement, intended to guide the physical upgrade of the site over the next twenty years. Council's objectives in commissioning the preparation of the Master Plan included:

- Maintain the authenticity of the Living Desert and achieve a balance between the natural world and the man-made environment.
- Identify required upgrades to the site to achieve accessibility and increase visitation by visitors and the community.
- Identify commercial opportunities.
- Support applications for State and Federal Government Funding to upgrade infrastructure.
- Address and note the sensitive cultural aspects to the site and opportunities to undertake sensitive cultural work relating to the First Nations community. Opportunities for cultural tourism currently being addressed in NSW.
- Address impacting environmental matters.

Environmental Partnership NSW were engaged in May 2024 to conduct initial activities essential for the development of the Draft Master Plan. Their responsibilities encompassed preliminary assessments, on-site evaluations, and stakeholder consultations. These efforts aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the site's conditions and the interests of various stakeholders, thereby informing the strategic direction of the Master Plan.

Environmental Partnership NSW has developed The Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan, providing a comprehensive strategic framework aimed at preserving the site's natural authenticity while proposing enhancements to accessibility, cultural engagement, and sustainable tourism.

- **The Master Plan** outlines potential upgrades to improve site accessibility, thereby increasing visitation from both tourists and the local community. It also identifies commercial opportunities that align with the site's character, supporting applications for State and Federal Government funding aimed at infrastructure improvements. Importantly, the Master Plan acknowledges the site's sensitive cultural aspects, proposing initiatives that engage with the First Nations community to undertake respectful cultural work and promote cultural tourism. Environmental considerations

have been addressed to ensure that development does not compromise the ecological integrity of the Living Desert State Park. Overall, the Master Plan lays a comprehensive foundation for sustainable growth, cultural enrichment, and environmental stewardship of this unique landscape.

- **The Business Plan** accompanies the Master Plan and assesses the current use and financial performance of the LDSP, identifies opportunities for increasing visitation and revenue generation and provides five-year trading forecasts.
- **The Action Plan** outlines a list of deliverable actions, each assigned a priority rating and an estimated cost to Council. This structured approach will guide the development of detailed project plans and budgets, enabling Council to take a considered and strategic path toward achieving the identified outcomes. It ensures that resources are allocated effectively, and that project delivery is aligned with organisational priorities and financial capacity.

The Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan, as prepared by Environmental Partnership NSW, is being presented in its original consultant format for Council's endorsement to proceed to a 28-day public exhibition period. Following public exhibition and formal adoption by Council, the final documents will be updated with Council's approved branding prior to publication on Council's website.

Community Engagement:

Council recognises the importance of internal Council, community and stakeholder engagement in shaping the future of The Living Desert State Park.

Environmental Partnership NSW visited Broken Hill in July 2024 to undertake stakeholder consultation to discuss the values and qualities of The Living Desert, and the pressures and opportunities stakeholders would like the Master Plan to address.

Consultation sessions were held with:

- Site Operations Crew
- Council Technical Officers
- Friends of the Flora and Fauna of the Barrier Ranges Committee
- Tourism Representatives
- Art and Culture Representatives
- Wilyakali Community
- Finance Considerations including Operation Costs & Budgets (Finance Accounting)

The sessions informed the development of the Draft Living Desert Master Plan, Draft Business Plan and Draft Action Plan, with Environmental Partnership NSW returning to Broken Hill in May 2025 to conduct presentations of the draft documents:

April 2025

- Council's Executive Leadership Team (via Teams)

May 2025

- Council Technical Officers
- Site Operations Crew and Volunteer Group
- Elected Members
- Tourism, Art and Film

Strategic Direction:

Key Direction:	4	Our Leadership
Objective:	4.2	Our leaders make smart decisions
Strategy:	4.2.7	Continue to look for efficiencies in the organisation and ensure financial sustainability

Relevant Legislation:

The following legislative frameworks collectively ensure that any Master Planning or development within the Living Desert State Park is conducted responsibly, preserving its ecological, cultural, and heritage values.

Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)
Local Government (General) Regulation 2021
Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW)
Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW)
National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)
Crown Land Management Act 2016 (NSW)
Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)
Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)
Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW)
Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)

Financial Implications:

This report does not carry any financial implications for Council.

The cost of the Master Plan Package was \$135,188.50 ex GST and approved within Council's 2022/23 Capital Works Budget.

Attachments

1. [↓](#) Draft Living Desert Master Plan
2. [↓](#) Draft Living Desert Business Plan
3. [↓](#) Draft Living Desert Action Plan

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