

Proposal for The Armidale Bicentennial Arboretum

Transforming the Arboretum into a World-Class Cold Climate Botanical Garden

Prepared for: Armidale Regional Council, NSW

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Executive Summary

This proposal seeks the support of Armidale Regional Council to enhance the Armidale Bicentennial Arboretum into a world-class botanical garden. Building on existing botanical assets and infrastructure, the garden will showcase the horticultural beauty and diversity of cold-climate plants — both native and exotic.

The proposed development will:

- Provide an inclusive community space for recreation, health, and wellbeing.
- Establish an iconic visitor attraction, drawing tourists to Armidale year-round.
- Deliver a living educational resource for biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability.
- Contribute to Armidale's identity as a Garden City and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Armidale – A Recognised Garden City

Armidale's identity as a Garden City is already evident through:

- The New England Garden Festival, which grew from 3,500 visitors in 2023 to 6,400 in 2024, supported by 3,500 participants in the 2024 Spring Garden Trail.
- The city's extensive street and park tree plantings, highly valued by residents and admired by visitors.
- The success of the Armidale Bunnings Garden Centre, which ranks third in per-capita sales across NSW — an indicator of strong local engagement with gardening.

Benefits and Opportunities

Community & Wellbeing

- Accessible to all demographics, supporting physical health, relaxation, and mental wellbeing.
- Provides inclusive appeal across the community, ensuring benefits are widely shared.
- A safe and inspiring space for families, groups, and individuals to enjoy.

Economic & Tourism

- A year-round visitor attraction, maximising tourism across all four seasons.
- Strengthens existing festivals through cross-promotion.
- Significant flow-on benefits to local businesses and the broader regional economy.

Education & Environment

- A living classroom for schools, the University of New England, and community groups.
- Promotes biodiversity, sustainability, and conservation awareness.
- Builds on prior soil, hydrology, and Aboriginal cultural studies, ensuring informed development.

Existing Infrastructure and Assets

The Arboretum already provides a strong foundation, including:

- Major arterial road access.
- Large carparking facilities for cars, caravans, and buses.
- Barbecue areas, playground, disability access, and toilet facilities.

- Established plantings: thousands of native and exotic trees, sensory garden, aquatic features (ponds, waterfall, bridge), grotto, and lookout.

Proposed Cold Climate Botanical Garden

The vision is to interconnect existing plantings into a unified garden landscape with themed areas, designed for low maintenance and drought tolerance. Proposed features include:

- Extended native gardens showcasing New England flora.
- Exotic themed gardens (spring bulbs, cherry trees, wisteria, roses, lavender).
- Seasonal gardens (summer perennials, autumn foliage, winter grasses).
- Succulent and cacti gardens on sloping terrain.
- Recreational lawns for relaxation and small-scale events.
- Public art installations by New England artists.

Alignment with Council and Government Priorities

This project supports:

- Armidale Regional Council's Community Strategic Plan: promoting liveability, sustainability, and economic growth.
- NSW Government environmental and tourism strategies: advancing biodiversity, climate adaptation, and regional visitor attractions.
- Community aspirations: reinforcing Armidale's brand as a 'City of Gardens.'

Next Steps

Further detailed planning can be provided on request, including:

- Historical background of the Arboretum.
- Detailed design elements and implementation timeline.
- Funding pathways for development and maintenance.
- Organisational and governance frameworks.
- Comparative case studies of botanical gardens and their economic/community benefits.

Conclusion

The transformation of the Armidale Bicentennial Arboretum into a world-class botanical garden is a unique opportunity to enrich community life, strengthen environmental education, boost the local economy, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Armidale is the ideal location for this landmark project. With Council's support, it can become a signature attraction for the region and beyond.