

Vacy

Community Development Action Plan



August 2025

Foreword



The confluence of two rivers lies at the heart of Vacy's Story of Place. Grinding stones and trees bearing canoe-shaped scars endure as quiet witnesses to an ancient tradition of gathering here and of hands and hearts acting in service to their community.

Today, that legacy endures, drawing people to this meeting point of waters and lives. You can see it at the Farmers Hotel on a Thursday night, the General Store with a coffee in hand on a morning, the school at the end of the day, and the hall when the car park spills out onto the street. Whether it's showing up at a community group meeting or simply having a chat, all around are people who care about this place and about each other.

The Vacy Community Development Plan, aka Vacy Village Vision, is what happens when community is given back permission to help draw the map. It's been shaped by our schoolchildren, community workshops, brainstorm sessions, historical walks, online surveys, emails, ideas box submissions, local disaster response meetings, and thoughtful comments on social media. Hundreds of voices have been woven together.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone — young and old — who has taken the time to share their dreams for Vacy. Your hopes, your stories, your ideas have helped light the path forward. Huge thanks also to the teens and adults who have already jumped in with curiosity and creativity, beginning to explore what turning these goals into action could look like on the ground. There's no dust settling here!

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the framework, backing and encouragement of Rural Aid and the Bank of I.D.E.A.S., and a supportive Dungog Shire Council. From all of us and the generations that will continue to benefit down the road, thank you.

For more details, updates, and information on how to get involved, head to the Twin Rivers Community Hub website at www.twinrivers.au. Your next idea or helping hand could be what brings the next part of the vision to life. And whether you're new or have been here forever but haven't yet had your say on the map — don't worry. This belongs to all of us, and there will always be room to pull up an extra chair.

Sian Ineson | Volunteer at the Twin Rivers Community Hub

Our Story

Vacy is a small village nestled in the picturesque Paterson Valley within the Dungog Shire, Hunter Region of New South Wales. Located at the junction of the Paterson and Allyn Rivers, it is known for its strong agricultural roots, scenery and community connections.

Aboriginal peoples have populated the Paterson Valley for thousands of years. Local historian Dr Brian Walsh summarises this enduring connection with these words: “Their history is one of relentless change. It is a dynamic history marked by continuous and at times dramatic changes in climate, sea level, landscape, population, social organisation, groupings, territories, lifestyle, diet and use of tools.”

When Europeans arrived from the early 1800s, they found the Paterson Valley home to the Worimi (Saltwater People), the Wonnarua (Freshwater People), and the Gringai towards the mountains.

The first record of the Vacy locality comes from Robert Brown, the botanist accompanying Lieutenant Colonel William Paterson’s 1804 expedition, who recorded “the country is everywhere hilly, but the valleys extensive and apparently all thinly wooded forest land.” It was into this thinly wooded grassland that European settlers arrived in the 1820s, leading to the displacement of the Aboriginal people. They brought sheep and cattle to graze the grasslands and soon cleared the thick forest from the river flats to grow crops.

Three members of the Cory family from Devon and Cornwall were granted land and also purchased additional property, leaving an indelible imprint on the district. One family member named his property on the south side of the Paterson River “Vacy,” after the house in Cornwall where he was born. This was to become the village of Vacy.

Because Cory’s Vacy property was at a logical place for settlers further up the valley to cross the Paterson River, a village grew to service travellers and the local area. It was initially called Clarke’s Crossing, but in time became known as Vacy. However, since all the land was owned by the Cory family, it remained a private village—in fact, one of Australia’s most enduring private villages.

The first church began in 1849, a hotel was built in 1858, a school was established in 1859, a post office opened in 1860, and a store was operating by 1868. By 1900, the village had a butcher’s shop and School of Arts. It remained a private village until 1927, when the entire Vacy estate was sold.

Today, despite its small size, Vacy remains a thriving community with a strong social fabric. The Vacy School of Arts Hall, Farmers’ Hotel, Vacy Sportsground, Vacy General Store and Motel restaurant continue to serve as gathering points for community members. Annual events such as the Vacy Country Carnival bring locals and visitors together in celebration of the town’s unique character and serve, as stated in its promotional materials, “as a reminder of our community’s rich heritage and the enduring power of food to bring us together.” The historic Vacy Bridge, built in 1898, and numerous other heritage sites provide a tangible link to the village’s past.

Just as the river connects the villages of Gresford, Vacy and Paterson, so too are they joined by a shared culture of contributing, with many shared organisations, activities and events. Vacy’s proximity to larger centres like Maitland and Newcastle, also means that residents can enjoy a rural lifestyle while still having access to city conveniences and employment opportunities.

Our Vision

A Vision Statement is a vivid description of what our community aspires to become, without its current barriers, but tied to what we value as a community.

The statement below is our intended outcome:

Where rivers meet,
so do we.

Hands-on, hearts
open, deeply
connected to the
land & each other.

Our Guiding Values

Guiding values are the fundamental, moral, and ethical beliefs that we share as a community. They represent core principles and capture what our community considers important. They help foster trust, respect, collaboration, and unity.

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

- 1. We know the easiest way to have a good neighbour is to be one.**
- 2. We do more when we work together and it's a hell of a lot more fun!**
- 3. We take care of our country, because it takes care of us.**
- 4. We respect the voices of the old and the young, it's where wisdom meets wonder.**



Our Goals

Community goals are broad statements of intent that direct our efforts towards accomplishing our vision in line with our guiding principles.

Below are the community goals which guide our community aspirations, namely:

- Foster connection through place and play by transforming shared spaces into lively and welcoming hubs that bring people together.
- Empower local kids by creating hands-on chances to explore, lead, and grow through outdoor adventure and increasing opportunities for genuine input.
- Build resilience by restoring natural systems, sharing knowledge, and building the social capital needed to proactively mitigate the risk of fire, flood, and whatever comes next.
- Create a model of council-community collaboration that's bold, clear-eyed, and refuses to settle for token gestures.
- Keep the conversation flowing and the doors open, so everyone stays in the loop and no one feels left out.
- Strengthen collaboration by getting creative around how we connect, communicate and support one another across the 3 villages (Vacy, Paterson and Gresford).

Our Challenges

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

- Poor road conditions (especially potholes)
- Limited and uninspired village signage and way finding
- Uninviting and poorly maintained public toilets
- Limited vehicle access to the river and few riverside activities, despite the river being a key community connection
- Very limited options for getting home safely from pubs, restaurants, and events after a night out, raising concerns about normalising unsafe behaviours among young people
- Closure and impending sale of St. John's Church
- Increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events (floods, droughts, bushfires) with impacts including ongoing riverbank erosion
- Decline in operational farms and financial pressures on farmers and what this means for farming families and local food security
- Limited, tired community facilities and uninspiring main street appearance (except for the beautiful new oval fencing)
- Failure to plan for active transport within the village and surrounding areas, especially connectivity for walking, cycling, and horse riding
- Insufficient Council investment in local infrastructure despite housing growth, with a clear Dungog-centric focus in decision-making
- Lack of Vacy-specific community group to advocate for the community at Council, to help drive investment in local infrastructure and green space that keeps pace with population growth
- Housing developments growth requires a robust strategy to preserve small-town character and strong community ties
- At times volunteer fatigue, and lack of recognition for efforts
- Limited local employment and childcare options
- Rising cost of living and increasing insurance costs for community events and activities
- High rates of wildlife road fatalities
- Limited retail sector with as yet unrealised potential to lead increased choice with local food/products
- Steeply rising property prices especially post-COVID, making it harder for younger family members to buy homes locally
- Absence of a formal welcome or integration strategy for new residents and limited nightlife for those seeking to meet new people

Our Assets

Culture, Stories & Sources of Pride

- Rural village lifestyle
- Strong culture of contributing
- Historical sites and buildings, including the Vacy Bridge, Clarkes Crossing, Old Creamery site, Old Butchers building, War Memorial, school buildings, Farmers Hotel, St John's Church, Angus McInnes Shed, link to old Hexham Oak Factory
- Arts including the Vacy School of Arts Hall, Vacy Community Arts Centre, Vacy Public School Mural
- Living history of the Wonnarua, Gringai and Worimi People
- Paterson Historical Society and their careful collection of our stories
- Private Village heritage, agricultural heritage, diary heritage, education heritage and Paddy Slavin story
- Local families' stories, for example the Brooker family butcher history
- Street Library
- Torryburn - influenced the writings of Dorothea Mackellar and her poem 'My Country'
- Iconic local annual events
- Native flora and fauna (including Platypus and Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos), and broad nature corridors

Institutions

- Vacy Public School
- Vacy Rural Fire Service
- Tocal College
- Out-of-School Care
- Partnerships with Rotary Club of Dungog
- Daily bus to Maitland
- School buses
- Dungog Shire Council

People

- Large number of heartworkers - volunteers and committees
- Our children and young people
- Vacy Public School and Mobile Preschool students
- Residents - long-term residents, new residents, former residents, part-time residents
- Community leaders, builders and drivers of change
- Skilled workers/residents, including farmers, tradespeople, hospitality staff, professionals, teachers, artists, craftspeople
- Community noticeboard and Vacy General Store noticeboard
- Vacy Community News Facebook Page

Our Assets

Physical

- Natural Features, including Paterson & Allyn Rivers, Clarke's Crossing, fishing spots, rural landscapes, dark sky
- Recreational Facilities, including the Village Green, sportsground, pavilion, playgrounds x2, BBQ shelter, cricket nets, vacant land at the back of the oval
- Infrastructure including Vacy Bridge, scenic roads linking the regions, electric vehicle (EV) charging station, toilet block, telephone booth, car park
- Community use buildings, including Vacy Public School, Vacy School of Arts Hall, St John's Church, Vacy Community Arts Centre
- Indigenous cultural artefacts such as scar trees and carving grooves
- Proximity to major population centres
- Proximity to, and shared resources with Gresford and Paterson
- Proximity to Newcastle International Airport

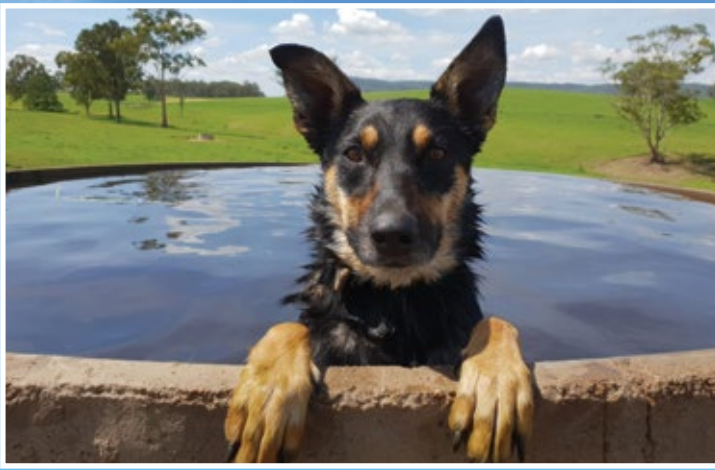
Social Networks

- Sports and Recreation, including Stockman's Cricket Club, Gresford-Vacy Football Club (Scorps), Gresford Vacy Cricket Club (Colts), formally informal Twin Rivers Community Hub and emerging Vacy Fishing Club
- Community and Social Groups, including Vacy Public School P&C, Vacy RFS, Vacy & Surrounds Crop Swap, Gresford Vacy Arts & Crafts Group, Vacy Country Carnival Committee, Oval and School of Arts Hall 355 Committees, Paterson-Vacy Red Cross
- Many others shared with Gresford and Paterson as listed on the Twin Rivers website

Economic

- Retail Businesses, including Vacy General Store and Post Office
- Tradespeople including plumber, electrician, roofer
- Hospitality and accommodation businesses, including the Farmers Hotel, Vacy Hunter Valley Lodge, Zabb Thai Restaurant, Eagle Reach, Banjos Bushland retreat, Cabins in the Clouds
- Agriculture and Food, including Vacy & Surrounds Crop Swap, Williams Dairy, Torryburn Horse Stud, other farms and roadside produce stalls
- Events and Activities, including Vacy Country Carnival, Vacy Cutting Day, Soccer 6s, Very Vacy Christmas Picnic
- Tourism Product, including Vacy Arts Centre, being along the Horseshoe and Country Wander Drive routes





Our Strategies & Actions

Theme One

Reimagine and expand our community spaces to enhance their role as hubs of connection and play.

ACTIONS

1

- 1. Bring the vacant land at back of the oval to life by creating a **pump/ bike track**, starting with a natural soil-based build, designed in consultation with the Vacy kids. Refine based on their feedback over time.
Timeframe: 2026/2027
- 2. Form a Task Team to explore the optimum location for a **multipurpose court with kicking wall** within the Vacy village. Once located, create a detailed budget that can be used to support grant application noting this may require land purchase than impacts build timelines (see below).
Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing
- 3. Form a Task Team to explore the possibility of **acquiring river land and developing a park space similar to Tucker Park** in Paterson.
Timeframe: 2026 and Ongoing
- 4. Create a roadmap for a **holistic rethink of the access, connectivity and parking of Vacy Village and surrounds**, including leveraging the knowledge of local experts and feedback from local road users.
Timeframe: 2026/2027
- 5. Work with local restaurant and/or **create a night market** to get the Vacy kids their dumplings!
Timeframe: 2025

LEAD GROUPS

Collective of Vacy community groups
Twin Rivers Community Hub

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Vacy Sportsground 355 Committee | RCP |
| VPS and P&C | Local landholders |
| DSC | Vacy residents |
| Zabb Thai | FRRR/Community Foundation |
| Anglican Church | TfNSW |
| RA | Local town planners and other experts |
| BOI | |

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Two

Empower our kids to dive into river adventures, exploring the great outdoors with their mates.

ACTIONS



1. **Host the Greatest Carp Muster** Vacy has ever seen, inviting friends from along the Paterson and Allyn Rivers.

Timeframe: 2025

2. Reel in solutions and cast away the obstacles to **launching an event-based Junior Fishing Club!**

Timeframe: 2025

3. See you at the crossing! **Broaden the sense of ownership at the Clarkes Crossing to improve access and inspire outdoor fun for all.**
Note: Access to be improved through low impact softscaping in order to respectfully work with the changing nature of the riverbank at this site.

Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing

4. **Make river access signage clear and inviting** so everyone can find their way.

Timeframe: 2025

LEAD GROUPS

**Collective of Vacy community groups
Twin Rivers Community Hub
Gresford District Landcare**

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**Hunter LLS
Landcare network
DSC
Hunter Water
Oz Fish/BCF
AUH
Vacy kids
Gresford Arts Community
Paterson Community Builders
VCCC
SCC**

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Three

Spark communication and collaboration within our village and neighbouring towns, so there is a greater sense of being welcomed, informed and united.

ACTIONS



- 1. **Foster a collective of Vacy community groups** to come together to discuss, share, plan and implement actions to help the village of Vacy achieve its vision and goals.
Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing
- 2. Work with Gresford/Vacy/Paterson to trial hosting a **monthly Community Stall at the Gresford Markets** to welcome new residents, help close communication gaps and spark conversation.
Timeframe: 2025
- 3. As a collective of community groups, work together to **increase the overall number of people feeling invited and excited about getting involved**, as it's the fastest pathway to a sense of belonging. A key focus to be increased **volunteer recognition**.
Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing
- 4. **Celebrate our living Indigenous history through art and oral history**, including exploring the potential for a video on the history of our scar trees in partnership with the Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation.
Timeframe: 2026 and Ongoing
- 5. **Support flood mitigation and riverbank stabilisation** by sourcing funding for riparian zone revegetation (tubestock) and **promoting greater community participation in Landcare and the LLS/Hunter Water's 4 Valleys Program**.
Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing

LEAD GROUPS

3 village collaboration (Paterson, Vacy and Gresford) including Paterson Community Builders, Twin Rivers Community Hub and GDCG
Collective of Vacy community groups including Vacy Oval 355 and Vacy Country Carnival Committee

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation | TTM |
| PHS | VCCC |
| Gresford Community Markets (GDCG) | Local businesses |
| Sporting and community groups within the 3 villages | VRFS |
| AUH | VPS |
| Real estate agents | GVCCC |
| Local land holders | GVFC |
| RCP | Landcare |
| | LLS |
| | DSC |
| | Vacy residents |

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Four

Create a reason to stop for drive-through tourists, to support local job creation, put a shine on the nightlife and create more consistent services for community members and businesses alike.

ACTIONS



1. **Explore our association with the old Hexham Oak Factory** as a way to honour our strong connection to dairy farming.
Timeframe: 2025/2026
2. **Make the public toilets beautiful again.**
Timeframe: 2025 and ongoing
3. Make it easy and welcoming for visitors to find their way to us with **clear, friendly signage and the potential for a small, self-guided information centre.**
Timeframe: 2027/2028
4. **Splash some colour on the town water supply tank.**
Timeframe: 2026/2027
5. **Update the play equipment in the Village Green** (we don't really use it but visitors do).
Timeframe: 2030
6. Explore **outdoor dining and a mural** at the site of the Great Wall of Vacy.
Timeframe: 2026

LEAD GROUPS

Twin Rivers Community Hub
DSC
Zabb Thai

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Local businesses
Hunter Water
Local artists
Local landholders, historians and story tellers
DRT
DVIC
AUH
Collective of Vacy community groups
Vacy residents
Sydney Rum Distillery (Oak Factory at Muswellbrook)

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Five

Dial up that small town charm

ACTIONS

1. Create a dapper plan to **polish our street appeal and plant community gardens**, with a focus on the Village Green.

Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing

2. Decide on a **platypus sculpture, mural or other public artwork** that celebrates our deep connection to the river valleys.

Timeframe: 2026/2027

LEAD GROUPS

**Collective of Vacy community groups
Twin Rivers Community Hub**

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**DSC
Landcare
Maplewood Permaculture
Vacy & Surrounds Crop Swap**

**Vacy residents
Local artists
Local businesses**

Theme Six

Work with the new Council crew to achieve two-way communication that's REAL

ACTIONS

1. **Design a sustainable communication strategy** then test, review and refine.

Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing

2. **Advocate for genuine community consultation on large housing developments**, pushing for larger lot sizes and development that is mindful of prime agricultural land, so growth benefits everyone and supports a healthy, sustainable future.

Timeframe: 2025 and Ongoing

3. Work with DSC to **create holistic support for barking dog issues**.

Timeframe: 2026 and Ongoing

LEAD GROUPS

**Collective of Vacy community groups
Twin Rivers Community Hub**

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**DSC
RSPCA
Local town planners and other experts**

**Vacy residents
RDA Hunter**

Abbreviations

AUH	Arts Upper Hunter
BOI	Bank of I.D.E.A.S.
DDCC	Dungog District Chamber of Commerce
DSC	Dungog Shire Council
DRT	Dungog Regional Tourism Inc.
DVIC	Dungog Visitor Information Centre
FRRR	Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
GDCG	Gresford District Community Group
GVCCC	Gresford Vacy Colts Cricket Club
GVFC	Gresford-Vacy Football Club
Hunter LLS	Hunter Local Land Services
P&C	Parents and Citizens Association
PHS	Paterson Historical Society Inc.
RA	Rural Aid
RCP	Rotary Club of Paterson
RDA Hunter	Regional Development Australia Hunter
RFS	Rural Fire Service
RSPCA	The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SCC	Stockmans Cricket Club
TfNSW	Transport for New South Wales
TTM	Town Teams Movement
VCCC	Vacy Country Carnival Committee
VPS	Vacy Public School
VRFS	Vacy Rural Fire Service

Acknowledgements

The formulation of this 'Community Development Action Plan' was initiated and coordinated by the Vacy Community Builders Team and enabled by Rural Aid as part of their commitment to supporting Australia's small rural towns. The formulation of the Plan was undertaken by Peter Kenyon (Bank of I.D.E.A.S.) with assistance from Steph Walsh (Rural Aid) and Jim Doyle (Rural Aid - Community Connector). Special thanks to the many passionate community members and organisations, especially Vacy Public School, who gave so generously of their time, wisdom, and experience.

We respectfully acknowledge the Wonnarua, Gringai and Worimi Peoples as the traditional custodians and First People of the lands which comprise the township of Vacy and its districts. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of the Wonnarua, Gringai and Worimi Peoples.

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Vacy

NEW SOUTH WALES

