Proposed Gamilaraay Learning, Culture & Country Centre

Conceptual Masterplan



By Yaggabi Dhangal Inc.

October 2026

yaggabi Dhangal Inc.

Yaggabi Dhangal Inc.
PO Box 66, Moree, NSW 2400
www.mehicentre.com Mobile 0438767906

Our Vision

Our vision for a Moree Aboriginal Cultural and Learning Centre.

The concept is to transform the existing Courallie High School site in Moree into a welcoming Aboriginal-led cultural, educational and community centre, retaining and adapting existing buildings wherever practical rather than starting again with a new-build campus. We are proposing that the site into a **Gamilaraay-led regional campus**, rather than attempting to recreate Courallie High School.

The underlying idea is,

A place where culture, education, Country, agriculture, science and economic development operate together.

The former campus already has an unusually useful combination of education, science, agricultural and workshop infrastructure. It was a Years 7–9 campus on Gamilaraay Country, and historical records show an agricultural component as well as substantial industrial-arts facilities. Sparo Reports

The masterplan below is deliberately **conceptual and not to scale** and does not account for all existing buildings. The exact placement of structures needs to be checked against the cadastral boundary, flood levels and a current survey.

Site planning principles

- Reuse first: inspect every building and prioritise sound structures for refurbishment.
- Aboriginal governance: cultural content, language, protocols and access to culturally sensitive material should be determined by the relevant local Traditional Owners and Aboriginal community.
- Connect the campus: link buildings with accessible shaded paths, verandahs, landscaping and clear wayfinding.
- Make Country visible: incorporate locally appropriate native plants, bush foods, medicinal plants and interpretive signage.
- Build in stages: open essential learning and community spaces first, then expand cultural exhibitions, workshops and outdoor facilities as funding becomes available.

1. The Overall Structure

We suggest the site into **seven precincts** around a central "Country Spine", a walkway and garden area.

The crucial planning principle is that **the landscape becomes part of the educational infrastructure** rather than simply being grass around buildings.

The Carol Street entrance would retained and a culturally appropriate entrance way be constructed that reflects local culture and/or history.

The other precincts could be:

- Gamilaraay Culture
- Education Centre
- Country and Cultural Centre
- Landscape and Science Centre
- Agriculture Enterprise and Research Centre
- Sport/Use and Community Centre

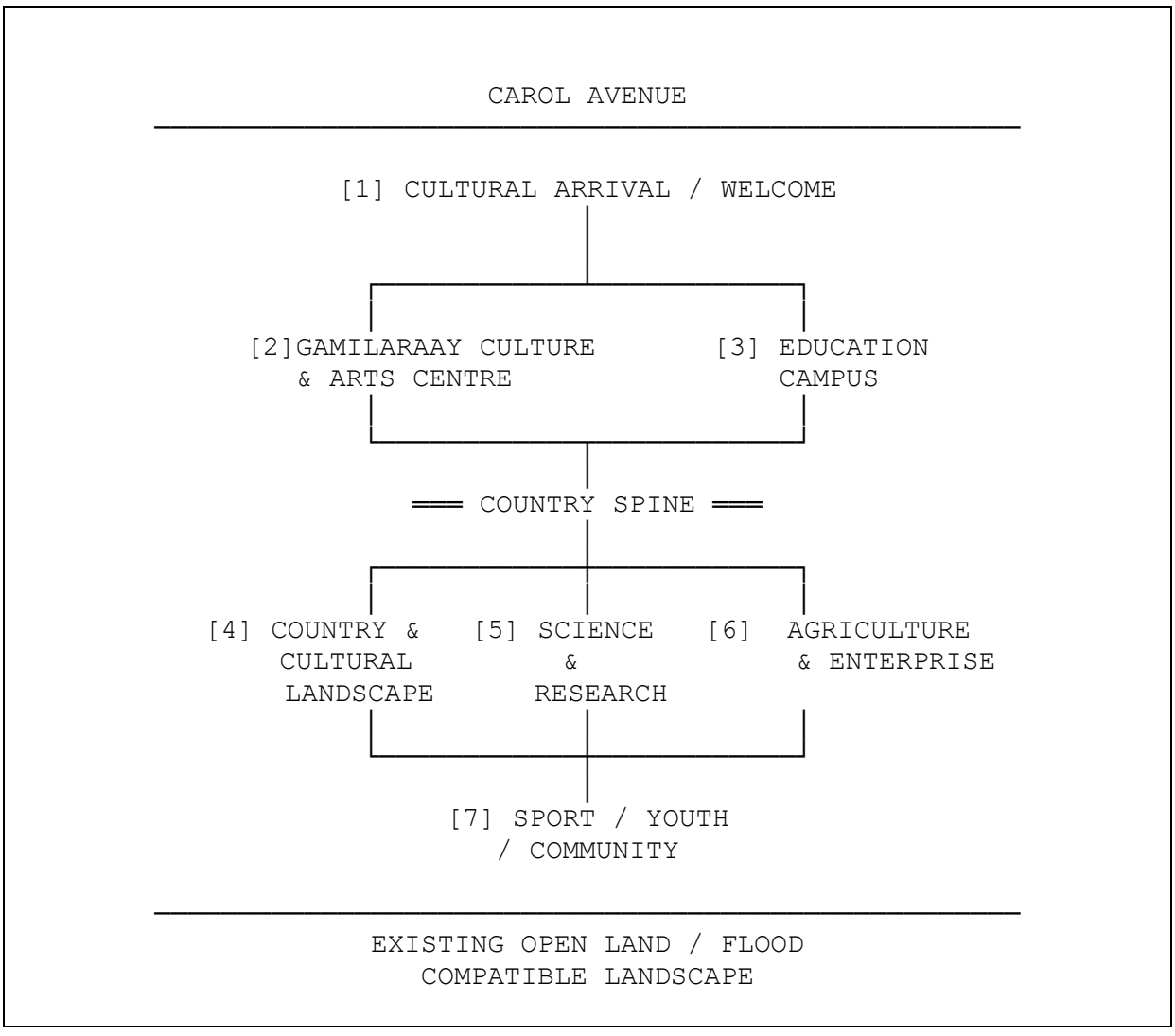


Figure 1. Conceptual Precincts in Master Plan

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Precinct 1 – Gamilaraay Welcome Place

The entrance should not look like a conventional school.

It should include a strong **Country-based arrival sequence** from Carol Avenue.

It could include:

- Gamilaraay language signage;
- sculptural/cultural markers;
- native planting;
- meeting circle;
- shaded gathering area;
- water feature representing the local river/wetland system;
- visitor reception;
- cultural information;
- community noticeboard;
- bus drop-off;
- accessible pedestrian entry.

The first experience should communicate that,

You are entering Gamilaraay Country.

The architectural design should be developed by Gamilaraay knowledge holders, artists and architects rather than having Aboriginal motifs applied to a predetermined building.

Precinct 2 – Gamilaraay Culture & Arts Centre

I would make this the **heart of the complex**.

Rather than a museum alone, it should be a living cultural institution.

Proposed facilities

Cultural gallery

- Gamilaraay history
- Country
- families
- language
- contemporary history
- local agricultural history

- Freedom Ride and Moree's civil-rights history

Language centre

- Gamilaraay language teaching
- recording studio
- language archive
- children's language programs

Elders' centre

- Elders' meeting room
- oral-history recording
- cultural mentoring
- private meeting spaces

Arts centre

- painting
- weaving
- carving
- textiles
- photography
- digital media
- music

Performance space

- indoor/outdoor performance
- dance
- cultural events
- community meetings

The building should open onto a large **cultural gathering landscape** rather than a conventional carpark.

Precinct 3 — Aboriginal Education Campus

This would use the strongest surviving educational buildings.

The objective would be to support Aboriginal students at **every stage of the education pathway**.

School-age education

- tutoring;
- literacy;
- numeracy;
- HSC preparation;
- STEM;
- mentoring;
- careers;
- school engagement.

Post-school education

- TAFE;
- university preparation;
- apprenticeships;
- agricultural training;
- professional development;
- adult education.

Digital education

A high-quality digital learning centre could provide access to:

- university courses;
- remote teaching;
- online qualifications;
- GIS;
- drone/remote sensing training;
- digital agriculture.

This would allow a young person in Moree to access educational opportunities without necessarily leaving Moree.

Precinct 4 — Country Learning Landscape

This is where I think the masterplan could become genuinely distinctive.

Instead of conventional ornamental gardens, I would create a **Gamilaraay Country learning landscape**.

It could contain a series of ecological zones:

River / wetland zone

Teaching:

- water cycles;
- wetlands;
- flood ecology;
- water quality;
- aquatic plants;
- biodiversity.

Native plant zone

- native plant nursery;
- seed collection;
- propagation;
- revegetation;
- bush foods;
- medicinal plants;
- habitat restoration.

Cultural landscape

- traditional plant use;
- cultural burning demonstration;
- seasonal calendars;
- traditional land management;
- cultural mapping.

Contemporary land-management zone

- soil health;
- regenerative agriculture;
- erosion control;
- salinity;
- carbon;
- biodiversity;
- water efficiency.

This could become an outdoor classroom extending across much of the site.

Precinct 5 — Science & Country Research Centre

I would strongly investigate retaining the **2010 science building**.

It could become:

Gamilaraay Country Science Centre

with laboratories for:

- water testing;
- soil testing;
- wetland monitoring;
- botany;
- ecology;
- agricultural science;
- environmental DNA;
- GIS;
- climate monitoring;
- Native restoration, riparian restoration

The existing science infrastructure makes this one of the most logical buildings to investigate for adaptive reuse.

The centre could partner with universities and research organisations.

Students could undertake actual research on:

Gwydir wetlands → Mehi River → agricultural land → biodiversity → climate → Country.

This would give the cultural centre a strong scientific dimension.

Precinct 6 — Agriculture & Enterprise

This could use the former **Agricultural Science** and **TAS/workshop** infrastructure where condition and asbestos assessments justify retention.

The historical presence of an Agriculture Farm at the Carol Avenue campus makes this particularly promising. Change.org

I would establish:

Agricultural training

- horticulture;
- cropping;
- grazing;
- native plants;
- irrigation;
- soil science;
- farm management.

Agricultural technology

- machinery;
- welding;
- fabrication;
- pumps;
- irrigation;
- solar;
- robotics;
- drones;
- precision agriculture.

Enterprise

A small commercial component could include:

- native plant nursery;
- bush-food enterprise;
- Aboriginal art;
- cultural tourism;
- agricultural products;
- training enterprises.

The objective would be to teach young people:

Culture → Country → skills → enterprise → employment.

Precinct 7 – Youth, Sport & Community

The existing multipurpose and sporting infrastructure could form the basis of a youth precinct.

Possible components:

- basketball;
- gym;
- youth centre;
- music;
- dance;
- outdoor gathering;
- men's programs;
- women's programs;
- youth mentoring.

The existing basketball/sporting infrastructure has already received significant rehabilitation investment in the past, so it should be assessed before replacement.

This precinct should be available after school hours, making the centre a **community asset rather than a facility that closes at 3:30 pm**.

2. What I would do with the existing buildings

This is where we would depart quite strongly from a conventional heritage/refurbishment approach.

🟢 RETAIN / ADAPT

B00G — Agricultural Science

Potential:
Country/agriculture teaching

B00T — 2010 Science

Potential:
Country Science & Research Centre

This is probably the strongest existing building candidate.

B00C — Multipurpose

Potential:
Youth/community/sport

Selected B00M workshop areas

Potential:
Cultural fabrication + agricultural technology

Subject to current asbestos and structural assessment.

🟠 INVESTIGATE CAREFULLY

Older general-learning buildings.

They could become:

- tutoring;
- offices;
- community training;
- language programs;
- temporary accommodation for programs.

But their age and asbestos history means refurbishment economics need to be tested.

🔴 POTENTIAL DEMOLITION

Buildings containing extensive friable asbestos or where:

The **asbestos removal + accessibility + fire compliance + electrical + hydraulic + thermal upgrade** approaches the cost of a new building.

The 2017 Department register identifies substantial asbestos issues in several of the older buildings, including friable material. Change.org

The register is now nine years old, so this needs a **new hazardous-material survey before any demolition or refurbishment decision**.

3. The most important landscape decision: flood

It would **not be sensible to fight the floodplain with massive amounts of fill** until detailed modelling proves that approach acceptable.

The Department itself undertook flood-impact assessment when assessing the former campus. Parliament of NSW

Instead, we would use a **three-tier flood strategy**.

Zone A — Critical infrastructure

Put here:

- archives;

- cultural collections;
- electrical systems;
- IT;
- laboratories;
- critical administration.

These should have appropriate finished-floor levels and flood protection.

Zone B — Normal buildings

Classrooms, offices and community buildings designed to the applicable flood requirements.

Zone C — Flood-compatible Country landscape

Use lower-risk areas for:

- wetlands;
- native vegetation;
- demonstration landscapes;
- recreation;
- open space;
- flood-compatible managed wetland and wet landscapes.

This converts a constraint into an **educational feature**.

4. Tailored Educational Programs

Some examples of educational programs suited to a Cultural and Learning Centre that encourage wide school age participation.

➢ "Gwydir Country" outdoor classroom

With an Indigenous focus, this could ultimately become one of the signature features.

Imagine a student walking through:

Gamilaraay seasonal calendar → native plants → traditional food → wetland → water testing → soil → agriculture → biodiversity.

The whole landscape becomes a curriculum.

That would connect the centre directly to the wider Moree/Gwydir landscapes and land uses.

➢ Moree Day School

Eventually the site could host an education program for visiting schools.

For example:

One-day program

Morning

Gamilaraay Country + history

↓

Mid-morning

Language + culture

↓

Lunch

Bush foods / contemporary food

↓

Afternoon

Water + wetlands + agriculture

↓

Final session

Art / cultural activity

This could bring **hundreds or thousands of students from across northern NSW** through the centre each year.

5. Cultural governance should be embedded in the masterplan

This is critical.

I would establish a **Gamilaraay Cultural Governance Council** for the project before architectural design.

It should have authority over:

- cultural interpretation;
- language;
- cultural materials;
- cultural landscape;
- Elders' spaces;
- cultural intellectual property;
- appropriate visitor access;
- research protocols;
- use of cultural knowledge.

The architect and engineers should then work **for that governance structure**, rather than the cultural component being added after the building has already been designed.

6. A possible campus hierarchy

I would give the campus three levels of access.

PUBLIC

- cultural gallery;
- café;
- visitor centre;
- art;
- performance;
- gardens;
- selected Country trails.

COMMUNITY

- education;
- youth;
- sport;
- meeting rooms;
- language programs;
- training.

CULTURALLY CONTROLLED

- Elders' areas;

- cultural archives;
- sensitive knowledge;
- ceremonial spaces;
- restricted collections.

This is particularly important because **not all Aboriginal knowledge should become public tourism material**.

7. Conceptual land allocation

Without a current survey we would use approximately:

Function	Indicative proportion
Culture & arts	12%
Education	15%
Science/research	8%
Agriculture/Country	25%
Cultural landscape	20%
Sport/youth	10%
Roads/services/parking	10%

These percentages are **conceptual only**, not measurements of the actual site.

We would deliberately allocate a surprisingly large proportion to **Country and landscape**.

That is what would distinguish the project from an ordinary education campus.

8. Staged project

Stage 1 — Secure the site

- title/cadastral investigation;
- current flood survey;
- asbestos survey;
- building-condition assessment;
- services audit;
- Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment;
- contamination assessment.

No major construction yet.

Stage 2 — Establish the cultural core

Build/refurbish:

- Welcome Place;
- Culture Centre;
- Elders' facilities;
- language centre;
- initial Country landscape.

This gives the community a visible institution relatively early.

Stage 3 — Education

Refurbish the best existing classrooms and create:

- learning centre;
- tutoring;
- digital learning;
- youth programs;
- vocational education.

Stage 4 — Country & science

Develop:

- science centre;
- native plant nursery;
- wetland laboratory;
- Country gardens;
- agricultural demonstration areas.

Stage 5 — Enterprise

Develop:

- agriculture;
- workshops;
- Aboriginal enterprise incubator;

- cultural tourism;
- training enterprises.

9. Relationship with the wider Moree region

The centre should **not attempt to contain all of Country inside the Carol Avenue boundary**.

Instead, it should become the hub for a much larger network.

A suggested network can be conceptualised this way:

Carol Avenue

↕

Moree

↕

Mehi River

↕

Gwydir wetlands

↕

farms and grazing properties

↕

Gamilaraay cultural sites

↕

schools / TAFE / universities

The centre becomes the **gateway**, not the entirety of the cultural landscape.

One important planning issue: The site should not be treated as completely vacant simply because the former secondary college consolidated at Albert Street.

The Carol Avenue campus was closed as the secondary college campus, but the history and current arrangements around other educational/community uses need to be established before a masterplan assumes control of every part of the property. The former campus is also currently the subject of competing proposals, including an Aboriginal/community-oriented vision, an agricultural boarding-school proposal and a 2026 Space Science School petition. New England Times. That makes a strong community-led alternative masterplan particularly timely.

10. Our recommended concept

We would call the project provisionally:

Gamilaraay Leaning, Culture & Country Centre

with the central proposition:

- **Culture is the foundation. Education is the pathway. Country is the classroom. Enterprise is the future.**

The existing Courallie infrastructure becomes the **starting point**, not the finished product.

And importantly, we would **not make the project solely about Aboriginal culture in the narrow sense**. Its strongest proposition is the connection between:

Gamilaraay knowledge + education + agriculture + science + water + land management + youth + enterprise.

That gives the project a very strong regional purpose and potentially makes it relevant to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people alike.

➢ The next step

A **site-specific detailed masterplan drawing**, based on the actual Courallie aerial/site layout needs to be drawn up, showing:

- every existing building;
- B00A/B00C/B00D/B00F/B00G/B00L/B00M/B00S/B00T;
- buildings to **retain / adapt / demolish**;
- proposed Culture Centre;
- education precinct;
- wetland landscape;
- agricultural area;
- native plant nursery;
- science/research centre

- youth/sport area;
- parking and bus access;
- flood-sensitive zones;
- proposed pedestrian "Country Spine".

Conceptual Master Plan

