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### The Strategy and Master Plan

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Council's decision on the runway upgrade and to investigate the current lease arrangements is another step in its master plan for the long-term future of the airport and surrounds.

The runway upgrade to allow for heavier aircraft covers all bases should different airlines choose to use the airport once Regional Express's exclusive rights to the Sydney route expire in 2013.

Council general manager Peter Tegart added that the investigation into the current lease arrangement and performance of the current lessee is also a key part of determining the future of the airport's operation as council's Merimbula Airport and Precinct Strategy (MAPS) takes shape.

"The strategy, in whatever form it's adopted, will look at the development prospects for the airport, and also look at issues in and around of the airport," he said when asked if large retail or commercial development was on the cards for that area.

"Now having had the benefit of community and government agency submissions and the independent feasibility study, the next step is to prepare the business plan – again independently and again with the assistance of users and other aviation parties.

"That will guide the final adoption of the airport strategy, because council will then be in a position to determine the best operating model for the airport – whether to own/operate, lease or go into a joint venture.

"That then will go into a master plan of what will go where, how much it will cost and how it will be funded."

Mr Tegart said once all those ducks were in a row, council would then be in a position to consider the long-term future for the airport precinct.

"That may or may not include a business park and that may or may not involve aviation or non-aviation users,"

he said.

The aviation users are the Merimbula Airport Users Group (MAUG), which comprises aircraft-related businesses that need proximity to the runway and is expressly concerned that should a business park be developed, their lease costs will rise.

"If they allow the Dogs-R-Us or whatever warehouse type arrangements, we won't be able to afford to be here," MAUG president Rex Koerbin said.

However, in some consolation to MAUG, council resolved to protect the existing users under future lease agreements as part of approving the runway upgrade at its meeting last week.

