



Community Update

Reference: 101; 102; 103/6
Report Author: Interim Administrator

On 10 September 2021 the Minister for Local Government gazetted an Order postponing the next Ordinary Election due on 4 December 2021 until September 2022 for the reason that the Council is the subject of a Public Inquiry. I table a copy of the Order.

Commissioner Ross Glover has now released the *Wingecarribee Shire Council Public Inquiry Information Paper* and elsewhere on this agenda is a General Manager's Report in relation to the matter. It is important to note the Inquiry is independent of the Council and residents, ratepayers and staff may be assured of the Council's total cooperation.

Tulip Time is Council's signature event and all who are responsible, especially those involved in planting around 120,000 bulbs – well done. The *Virtual Tulip Time* launched on 30 September at least allows people outside of the LGA to enjoy the visual spectacle this year but it is very disappointing that our visitor economy has not been able to take advantage of the event for the past two years. From meeting many residents particularly in Corbett Gardens, they have enjoyed being able to leisurely take in the garden's splendour without the clutter of stores. Some residents have questioned whether the rental of some represents good value and no doubt staff in debriefing this year's event will take that into account.

On Monday 20 September I joined the Member for Wollondilly Nathaniel Smith, the Mayor of Wollondilly Shire Council and the Transport Heritage NSW Chairman, when Mr Smith announced additional funding of \$9.1million to reopen the loop line from Buxton to Colo Vale. This is an exciting announcement for the Northern Villages and the work of Mr Smith in securing total funding of \$14.6million is acknowledged.

Many tourists will be brought into the Shire to enjoy a ride on 'the golden age of steam trains' and no doubt many will simply just want to experience the trains in the Big Hill Cutting just north of Hill Top. The location of what was the deepest railway cutting in the southern hemisphere is not well kept and is dangerous. In addition, there is no landscaping around the nearby sculpture *Human Endeavour* which commemorates the achievements of workers (including 3 who tragically lost their lives in an explosion) in creating the Big Hill Cutting.

The site will no doubt have some heritage sensitivities but I have asked the General Manager to commence design and costing work on a viewing platform, landscaping and parking and to seek grant funding from Government to enhance the project with a view to it being in place before work on the loop line is completed – estimated to be in mid-2023.

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Following the decision to no longer proceed with the Station Street improvements and to modify the works, I reported to the June 2021 meeting that approximately \$4.1million would be available as the balance of the initial \$7.5million grant from the Government. Approaches were made to the Members for Goulburn and Wollondilly seeking their support to have the balance reallocated and I outlined agreed priorities.

Representations were made to the former Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW advising of the lack of community support and significant shortfall in funding (\$17.7m) for the Station Street Project and requesting reallocation of funds.

A reply has now been received advising that Restart NSW funds are awarded to specific projects following a rigorous independent assessment process by Infrastructure NSW. Including a requirement that projects must achieve a benefit to cost ratio of greater than 1.0. Restart NSW funds are offered to the approved project only and unfortunately Council has been advised that it is not able to be reallocated to the other nominated projects. In addition, Council staff have confirmed that while the proposed works in Station Street will address a number of community concerns and issues, they do not pass the benefit to cost ratio test.

That is the bad news but the good news is that the former Deputy Premier encouraged Council to work with his Department to discuss potential funding options for the nominated projects and in this regard productive meetings have already been held.

Ensuring a suitable space for an Emergency Operation Centre is a priority and an area in the Civic Centre was proposed by the former Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON). This was seen as potentially not being achievable, however, in discussions and work to date, the General Manager has advised that there is a space which is able to be considered. I have met with senior emergency management staff and a report to the November Council meeting will present options for how this could be achieved for the short to medium term. A detailed response to the Owens report on Council's response to the 2019/20 bushfires will be presented to Council in December, however, I have determined it critical to progress this item and to seek State Government funding assistance.

The location of the water tank near the RFS shed in Balmoral is still causing some community concern and following a recent meeting with the regional office of RFS it has been agreed that Council will further investigate the concerns expressed and exploratory bores will be sunk to provide more certainty.

I will be conducting further Community Meetings across the villages and towns from now until December. These meetings will be open forum meetings and will provide an opportunity for the community to directly ask questions and raise matters of concern. The details for meetings, including tickets, are now available on Council's website. It is important that Council continues its engagement with the community to regain its trust and

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ensure the community's involvement in Council's decision making process, particularly during this time of Administration.

Arrangements are also being made for me to visit all community volunteer based RFS and SES groups before Christmas – hopefully on their training nights.

The General Manager has also advised that staff are working to ensure that our Australia Day celebrations are more inclusive and some exciting ideas will be presented to the November meeting.

Residents would be aware that the State Government has given notice of its intention to sell Berrima Gaol as it is no longer being used. Discussions have been held with the Berrima Residents Association, Property and Development NSW and our local Member for the area, Wendy Tuckerman MP. The discussions have been very constructive and Council is seeking to work with all parties to develop a community led strategic vision for the site/precinct to help frame the Expressions of Interest process.

It is hoped that this collaborative approach will identify key planning priorities that will help shape the future use of this heritage icon, provide certainty to proponents, build confidence in the community and deliver a good outcome for all.

And finally, this will be the last meeting that Ms Marissa Racomelara and Mr Malcolm Ryan will attend –although they will not be lost to the organisation completely. Personally, and on behalf of the Shire community a big thank you to you both – I know that COVID restrictions have kept you from your families and we appreciate your efforts throughout your time here.

It is also opportune to welcome our new Directors, Carmel Foster, Geoff King and Karin Targa – I'm confident that together with the General Manager they will work for the benefit of the Wingecarribee Shire and they are well aware of the task ahead and the opportunities available in such a wonderful region that has engaged residents and an enthusiastic, dedicated and professional staff.

Viv May PSM

Interim Administrator