
Community Update

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

When reporting to Council in September on the General Manager's Performance Review, I indicated the Panel's desire to review same and that I would report accordingly. I am now in position to advise that with the support and experience of the independent residents and the third-party facilitator, the General Manager has agreed to a refreshed approach.

The new agreement is underpinned by the Councils adopted Community Strategic Plan, the implementation of the "Road Map" and industry key result areas. Specific priorities include: a recast of the current budget to allow residents a greater understanding of resources and accountabilities, improved DA processing times, a review of communication and engagement strategies and a cyber focus.

Village and localities tours continue and to date I have visited Balmoral, Berrima, Bundanoon, Burrawang/ Wildes Meadow, Colo Vale, Exeter, Kangaloon, Medway and Wingello. In the new year, I will have meetings at Bullio, Hill Top, New Berrima, Avoca, Robertson, Yerrinbool and Penrose. These meetings are a valuable listening tool and I will continue to be available to discuss issues & solutions with residents and address matters where I can be of assistance.

Fire fighting water tanks are still a huge issue and I have asked the General Manager for a report to Council's February meeting on progress. Additionally, I have asked that a number of matters not included in the Community Strategic Plan be prioritised by staff including the possibility of public toilets (or access to existing toilets) in Balmoral Village and Yerrinbool and a possible RFS facility at Bullio.

As part of the Village tours I have been undertaking, I recently met with the Exeter Community to discuss some of the issues that are relevant to the Village. It was clear to me that the Community strongly value the unique character and identity of the Village, and I share their views that it's a character that is worth protecting. I was somewhat surprised to learn that, despite the historic nature of the Village, there is no protection through a Heritage Conservation Area.

In this regard, Council Officers are currently undertaking a major review of Heritage Items and Conservation Areas, and I have asked the General Manager to consider as part of this process, whether a Heritage Conservation Area across the Exeter Village is appropriate, and if so, to engage the local community to determine a suitable boundary.

I have had recent meetings with the President of the Mittagong Lions in relation to some issues at Mittagong Oval. Alarmingly, despite being built approximately 8 years ago, there are no access ramps to the Oval change shed and toilets and I recommend that delegated

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authority be given to the General Manager to progress this as matter of urgency that \$43,000 be allocated and be subject to funding report to Council with the next quarterly financial statement.

In mid-September the Office of Local Government issued a Discussion Paper to seek the views of Councils on a change to the employment conditions of senior staff. Presently, senior staff positions must be employed using a standard contract of between 1-5 years. Following recent ICAC findings and recommendations, the parties to the Local Government Awards are seeking a change that the only employee under contract be the General Manager and all other positions, in effect, be under the Award. The General Manager has prepared a response to the paper and in view of the timelines for submissions and as I fully support the conclusions, it was forwarded to the Office of Local Government. A copy of the response is attached to this Minute and I recommend the General Manager's actions be endorsed.

Without wishing to become involved in the pros and cons of the Frensham Development Application, I am very concerned following the issue of the Councils 2021/2022 Annual Report on third party legal costs of \$328,194.19 (plus \$21,593 from 2020/2021). It is my understanding that the applicants initiated legal proceedings and the matter was never reported to the Independent Panel for its consideration. Uncontrolled expenditure of this nature is inappropriate, and I have asked the General Manager for a report to Council to ensure that there is no repeat. While this matter has played out in the Courts, the community is entitled to know its views of its professional officers.

As I foreshadowed at the November Council meeting, I raised the allocation of the Banksia Street/ Colo Vale sale funds at the Colo Vale community meeting last Tuesday night. We had a very constructive discussion resulting in those present supporting the allocation of \$130,000 to the Men's Shed, with the balance to be made available following further consultation. It was agreed that the Community group would organise their own public meeting to discuss the issue and Council would provide some ideas on what the balance could fund at Jurd Park, the park adjoining the railway station or any other location in the Village. Discussion also took place in relation to the future of Jasmine Street Park. Accordingly, I would recommend that \$130,000 of the Colo Vale funds be allocated to the Men's Shed project and be made available subject to normal operational protocols.

At a briefing meeting last week, organised and attended by our Local Members with the Minister for Regional Roads, the Hon Sam Faraway, I was able to personally thank him for the \$418,000 allocation for pothole repairs and to also encourage more funds for this urgent work. Council staff also gave excellent presentations to the Members and Minister in relation to the tender for Old South Road and progress of the Moss Vale By-Pass and Berrima Road Overpass proposals. I note that Old South Road and construction options are listed on the Agenda.

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We are all well aware the Shire has been hit by a seemingly relentless wave of flood & severe weather events in the past 12 months.

And we are not alone. A total of 126 of New South Wales' 128 local government areas have had natural disaster declarations within the last 12 months, according to the President of Local Government NSW, Darriea Turley.

On the 3rd of November 2022, Local Government NSW declared a State-wide Roads Emergency and I was pleased to be part of that decision.

The Declaration – and urgent call for the NSW and Federal governments to increase their existing road funding commitments in the wake of the floods - comes on the back of an estimated \$2.5 billion in road damages and a collapse of the local and regional road network.

The Declaration has already been publicly supported by our peak regional body and the Country Mayors Association of New South Wales.

As part of the Statewide Roads Emergency, LGNSW and the Country Mayors Association of NSW are calling for:

- An acceleration and significant increase in funding for the \$1.1 billion Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges program from the New South Wales Government
- A boost to Road Block Grant funding to compensate for the damage to the regional road network from the Federal Government
- New funding to provide councils with plant machinery and skilled workers to expedite road repairs from the Federal Government.

The local and regional road network is critical-enabling infrastructure. It is absolutely vital to our primary producers, and the key to keeping affordable food on the table across New South Wales and beyond.

Our road network, and the road network of Shires across the State, have disastrous damage. We are facing a task that is beyond the reasonable scope of any local government authority. We face an unprecedented disaster that requires an unprecedented response.

We need help. Our community needs help. Other regional and rural communities across the State and beyond need help. We desperately need our leaders to lead.

Council should support our peak bodies in their declaration of Statewide Road Emergency.

This is an emergency, and I will be writing to the Prime Minister and Premier seeking even further financial assistance.

Residents would be aware through local publicity that a briefing was recently held at the Council Chambers on the excellent work that has been undertaken by Council Officers in relation to strategic land use planning. I again, make it very clear that the Council has

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adopted a Local Housing Strategy and no spot rezonings will be entertained during the period of Administration of the Council – and hopefully after. The implementation of the Strategy is dependent on proper infrastructure being fully planned and funded. Residents will hear a lot more about this over the coming 12 months.

As the Festive season fast approaches, I wish to recognise the many volunteers who give so freely to the betterment of the Shire and to whom we are all indebted. There can be no better example of such generosity than the splendid Angels in our Town Parade in Bowral last Saturday night and the concert that followed in Corbett Gardens. Congratulations to all involved and I look forward to the Festival of Lights celebration as it continues through to 31 December 2022.

To the General Manager and the Staff of the Council I say thank you for a job well done. Restoring community confidence and trust is a work in progress and the hard work will continue over the next 12 to 18 months.

Viv May PSM
Administrator