

REPORT ON HEPBURN SHIRE COUNCIL MEETINGS AND BUSINESS FOR 2009

Third Ordinary Meeting of Council, 17 March 2009 in Creswick

Councillors Reports. The meeting commenced with a brief report from each of the councillors, starting with the Mayor, Cr. Bill McClenaghan. He stated that since the last Council meeting, the most pressing matter had been the threat of bushfires, in particular the Muskvale fire of 23 February. The Mayor reported that this fire had burnt some 2,800 hectares and destroyed 21 buildings (only one of which was a residence). Six railway bridges had been burned as well. The good news was that there was no loss of life from the fire. The Mayor stated: “We owe our fire fighters a great deal of gratitude” and commended all those involved who had gone “above and beyond the call of duty”. He mentioned that there had been a lot of apprehension and indeed trauma in the community, due to the threat from these fires. He also said that the Hepburn Shire Council (HSC) had set up two task forces to help the community recover from the fire.

The reports from the other councillors dealt with a range of local issues. Cr. Barrell reported on the formation of the Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens Advisory Committee, and the Hepburn Friends of Spring group. It was noted by Cr. May that the local aquifer springs are very old, ranging in age from 2,000 to 20,000 years.

Public Question Time. In order for any member of the public to ask questions of the Council (not individual councillors, as apparently this is no longer the procedure), they now have to submit written questions to the Council by midday of the date set for any council meeting. The verbal answer would then be provided by the council official whose area of responsibility was concerned, and the questioner would also receive a written reply as well. If the questioner was present at the council meeting, they had the opportunity of asking “live” follow-up questions. It was rather obvious to this observer, that this new procedure still did not sit well with some members of the public.

There were a wide-ranging variety of questions asked at the meeting. Some had to do with the implications of Local Law 1, and whether in fact this law was appropriate. One question had to do with the possibility of more isolated, rural communities getting regular council rubbish removal services (the answer was that a majority – 51% - of the residents in that locality would have to request such

service from the council). One question had to do with request for a permit to do some cleaning in Holcombe Ward. One question had to do with the possibility of an industrial land site or zone in the Creswick area. The questioner stated that he had been waiting for the past 8 years for permission from council to set up a business on a particular site, and was wondering if he would have to wait another 4 years before he could get an answer. The answer was that the site in question had some indigenous claims pending, also environmental studies were needed, so no quick resolution of the issue could be offered. Generally speaking, it would appear to this observer that about 2/3 of the questioners still felt unsatisfied, or that the matter that they had raised was unresolved.

Proposed Amendment to include former Clunes School of Mines in Heritage Overlay of Hepburn Planning Scheme. The Clunes School of Mines was established in 1890 and a building to house this school was built in 1892. Apparently this building had been overlooked for inclusion as a heritage status building in the Hepburn Planning Scheme of 2000. The building is currently owned by the Department of Sustainability and the Environment, and is in need of repair and conservation to the tune of an estimated \$70,000-. The motion to “initiate the Planning Scheme Amendment C51 to include in the Hepburn Planning Scheme Schedule to the Heritage Overlay an additional item referencing the former Clunes School of mines building and site” was unanimously adopted at the meeting.

Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens Kiosk tender panel composition. This report concerned the proposed panel member composition for the evaluation of the kiosk which is to be operated at the Botanic Gardens on Wombat Hill. Tenders for the operation of this kiosk closed on 12 March 2009. Council recommended that a three-person panel be established to look into this matter, composed of Cr. Jon Barrell (he is also Chairperson of the Wombat Hill Botanic Gardens Advisory Committee), a representative from the Advisory Committee who is a community representative, and a senior council officer who is not involved in the day to day management of the contract for the proposed kiosk operation.

Interestingly, there was some discussion in this issue, which normally would seem to be a straightforward matter. It seemed that in some way, the normal procedure for choosing / appointing the evaluation panel was waived or changed, and some councillors had concerns about this. Cr. May moved an amendment to the official recommendation, then withdrew it in favour of the amendment proposed by Cr. Barrell. Cr. Sebastian Klein, the youngest councillor, made the excellent point that reliable procedures should be followed by the HSC in such matters. Otherwise, the community becomes suspicious about any alteration to normal

procedures and processes. The amended recommendation was then passed unanimously.

General Revaluation 2010. It was proposed that Council is required under Section (6) of the Valuation of Land Act 1960 to conduct a generation revaluation of all rateable properties within the municipality every two years and advise other interested rating authorities within the meaning of the Act. It was recommended that council undertake such a generation revaluation of properties within the HSC, and “that the valuation is to be returned at the levels of value as at the 1 January 2010” (I am really not sure of the exact meaning of this phrase, but my interpretation is that the revaluation be put into effect by the date of 1 January 2010). The recommendation was passed unanimously.

Monthly financial report. This was the next item on the agenda, but at this point, your faithful reporter chose to depart the meeting.

Zackary Casper