Council happenings . . .

Local Waste Strategy

Council recently resolved to place its draft Local Waste Strategy on public exhibition. This Strategy is an important document which will assist in the planning of waste management functions for the next 20 years.

The draft Strategy provides some interesting data on what wastes we produce and how we dispose of it. It also provides detailed information regarding Dungog Shire’s responsibilities to address State and National waste targets. These mainly relate to the amount of waste diverted from landfill and the protection of the environment through re-use and recycling of resources.

I have mentioned in the past that Dungog Shire definitely punches above its weight in regard to our waste minimization and recycling efforts with regional figures showing that we currently produce the lowest amount of per capita waste out of all Hunter Council areas and also have the second highest rate of diverting waste from landfill. Notwithstanding this, the State target for waste diversion is 75% by 2021-22 and if we don’t make changes to our current services we will fall well short of this target.

The draft Strategy provides a number of options for future waste collection and disposal systems but concludes that the best option for future kerbside residual waste disposal would be to transport it away from our existing landfill for processing at a facility that utilises Alternative Waste Technology such as the composting plant at Raymond Terrace. The benefits of this would be that we would then divert around 75% of our waste from landfill with the bonus that our existing landfill life will be extended out for another 30-35 years. Our recycling collection would remain as current. The costs of the various options are provided in the draft document.

I would encourage interested people to have a look at the draft Waste Strategy and to provide Council with feedback over the next month during the exhibition period. Copies of the draft Strategy can be viewed at Council’s administration building or on the website at www.dungog.nsw.gov.au

Brig O’Johnston Bridge (Clarence Town Bridge)

Under the ‘Bridges for the Bush’ program, Roads and Maritime Service (RMS) have estimated the cost of the upgrade of the bridge to be $14 million, with stated project benefits being ‘to provide continuous safe service levels’ and ‘reduced annual recurrent maintenance costs’.

The bridge was completed in 1880 and completely rebuilt in 1926/27.

Planning works to upgrade the bridge are currently underway, working through options in consultation with the State Heritage Office. I understand that Heritage is keen to retain the ‘full heritage’ of the bridge whilst RMS is keen to use some structural steel as large size hardwood is difficult to obtain.

The current $14 million refurbishment budget is, I believe, already likely to be exceeded and the end result will be a one lane bridge which will not allow for pedestrian or cycle access across the bridge. In view of the subdivision and building activity occurring on the eastern side of the river, the provision of safe pedestrian and cycle access is imperative. Refurbishment of the current bridge will also mean recurrent bridge closures which could be over extended periods causing substantial inconvenience to the residents and businesses of Clarence Town.

I am told that a new two lane concrete bridge with safe pedestrian/cycle success would cost substantially less than the refurbishment of the existing bridge. The refurbished timber will need expensive ongoing maintenance with substantial rebuilding in another 20 years. A new concrete bridge could be expected to last 80-90 years with minimal maintenance and be more ‘fit for purpose’ than a one lane timber bridge.

I believe that this project should be revisited and that reassessment must include genuine community consultation.

17 September 2014