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*Victorian Premier Denis Naphthine called by the Loddon Shire stand at this year's Regional Victoria Living Expo to pick up one of Council's sheep-shaped stress balls and offer his congratulations. The Shire won the award for Best Council Stand at the event. Pictured with Mr Naphthine were, from left, staff members Carol Canfield, Helen Tonkin and Christine Coombes. Full report inside*

## Flood works: the job's done

This month signals the close of a remarkable period in the life of Loddon Shire, with Council's exhaustive two-year flood restoration program coming to an end.

The massive task of rebuilding roads and town infrastructure after the floods of 2010/11 was made possible by generous grants from the Department of Treasury and Finance under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, a joint federal/state agreement.

In total, Council will have spent around \$33 million in 27 months, repairing and rebuilding road, bridge, footpath and drainage networks and restoring some integral community assets.

Of that amount, roughly \$1.2 million has gone to clean-up and flood response, \$25 million to roadworks, \$1.4 million on administration and contract management and around \$6 million to repairing and replacing community infrastructure.

To achieve its ambitious program, Council beefed up its outdoor plant and equipment resources with the

purchase of additional graders, tractors and trucks worth about \$2.9 million.

It also hired 23 new staff for the two-year period and boosted its use of contractors.

Despite its daunting scale, Council's overall flood recovery program has come in under budget and on time.

Chief Executive Officer John McLinden said enormous progress had been achieved since the first government flood recovery funding came through in March 2011.

"It's been many months of intense work for Council's staff and contractors," Mr McLinden said.

"The generous support of federal and state governments has meant the Shire has been able to tackle a far-reaching and ambitious program of repairs and recovery, hand-in-hand with local communities.

"We are deeply grateful for the support that's been offered and take great pleasure in seeing the many improvements and advances achieved."

# Message from the Mayor

As winter closes in, we know we'll encounter some chill winds, sharp mornings and (hopefully) some wet days, but there will be compensations.

Rug up for a day at the footy or netball at one of our local grounds and cheer on your side. Catch up with friends at a nearby pub or café, go for a brisk walk in a state park, go cycling or drop in to one of our excellent wineries.

This is a time of year in Council when we look both backwards and forward.

It's great to reflect on the wrapping up of our two-year flood recovery program this month, which has seen a massive effort by Council and community members alike in rebuilding and restoring community infrastructure.

There are some inspiring success stories, such as the brand-new facility at the Newbridge recreation reserve, opened just last month, and the dramatic change now under way at the Bridgewater public caravan park.

Just as importantly, Council staff and contractors have devoted their energies to extensive roadworks around the Shire, as well as repairs for public halls, reserves and other community assets.

It's a huge success story for all of us, carrying with it a fresh challenge to continue to deliver service of the same quality into the future.

Looking forward, Council is currently considering its budget for 2013/14. The proposed document is available for public comment until 12 June prior to being formally adopted before the end of the financial year.

With winter's gloom now with us, I ask all motorists to drive carefully and at speeds suitable for the conditions. Use your headlights, too, so others can see you.



*Cr Geoff Curnow*

## Tourism app takes off

Loddon Shire has made a solid move into the digital world over the past six months with the release of a new tourism app for smartphones and tablets and posting the Loddon Valley Official Visitor Guide online as an e-book.

Visitors can now find out about the region's attractions through printed material, their computer screens or their hand-held devices.

Tourism Manager Robyn Vella says it's all about "being savvy in the digital space".

"Lots of people who are travelling want information at their fingertips and this move gives us the opportunity to play our part in the online world," Mrs Vella says.

An increasing number of municipalities and tourism regions are going the same way.

Visitvictoria lists, among others, tourism apps for Ballarat, Beechworth, Bright, Golden Plains, the Great Ocean Road, Shepparton, the Grampians and the Sun Country, as well as online guides for food and wine regions, shopping, history and heritage, outdoor activities and transport options.

"It's all about giving Loddon the best exposure we can in what is really a competitive tourism market," Mrs Vella says.

The app is free and can be downloaded by visiting the app store on your phone or tablet.

The e-book version of the Loddon Valley Official Visitor Guide is a full-colour, 54-page publication detailing the region's natural attractions, water sports options, gold rush heritage, wineries and artistic life.

To find it, log on to [www.loddon.vic.gov.au](http://www.loddon.vic.gov.au) and click on the cover thumbnail at bottom right of the screen.

The publication is also available in hard copy at Loddon Shire Offices, the Loddon Visitor Information Centre, tourist information stands and regional visitor centres in neighbouring shires.



*Council's Economy and Community Director, Bryan McEwan, speaks at the launch of the app in Wedderburn, flanked by Mayor Cr Geoff Curnow.*

## New landfill open

Council's Boort landfill site has almost tripled in size with a major renovation project completed last month.

Formerly 39,000 square metres in area, the tip has expanded to 108,000 square metres after extensive earthmoving and re-fencing work.

Council estimates the \$50,000 overhaul, funded as part of the 2012/13 capital works program, has increased the lifespan of the facility by about 10 years.

Further to the extension works, the former landfill area has also been capped with clean fill and is in the process of being rehabilitated.

In addition to traditional landfill disposal facilities, the Boort site also maintains a suite of recycling facilities, with paper, cardboard, glass, metals, used chemical drums, e-waste and used oil all accepted.

For more information regarding the operation of the Boort waste management facility or the recent expansion works, contact Darren Schultz on 5494 1200.

# Loddon leads the way



*LEFT: Council's staff volunteers were thrilled to win the award for Best Council stand at the Regional Victoria Living Expo.*

*RIGHT: Loddon Shire's Lynne Habner was one of six Council staff members who manned the Shire's stand at this year's expo.*



Council can look back on its participation in this year's Regional Victoria Living Expo in Melbourne with a great deal of satisfaction.

The big thrill was the announcement by Victorian Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional and Rural Development Peter Ryan that Loddon Shire had won the award for Best Council Stand at the event.

It was a big field to beat, with all of Victoria's 48 regional municipalities taking part in the three-day expo held in Melbourne in April.

Six Council staff volunteered to man the site over the weekend, exhausting their supplies of printed material and promotional DVDs as they dealt with visitors' questions about house prices, work and education options, lifestyle factors and more.

With 15 per cent more patrons than last year's inaugural event, the expo has been hailed a huge success – official figures show almost 9,500 people attended.

Alongside the council and exhibitor stands, a full cultural and entertainment program included the Victoria Police Band, the Alexandra and Euroa Combined Concert Band, the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Aboriginal singer Kutcha Edwards, Ballarat performance group Existdance and African musician Monga Mukasa.

There were special appearances by singer/songwriter Mark Seymour, former Geelong footballers Cameron Mooney and Brad Ottens, Australian cricketer Clint McKay and AFL legend Robert DiPierdomenico.

A packed seminar program explored subjects ranging from rural education and career options, housing and setting up in business, to how to fit into a country community.

A Sport Precinct shone the spotlight on football, cricket and netball opportunities in rural Victoria, with the chance to try handball, catching and goal-shooting skills.

The Interactive Zone was a winner with the kids, with the chance to build an eco-cubby, performances from Polyglot Theatre, a "live mural" from Mildura, face painting and roving entertainers.

The Australian Centre for the Moving Image presented real-life stories from rural Victoria and Coles Regional Pantry offered tastings and demonstrations of farm produce.

As a member of the Murray River Group of Councils, the Shire also took part in a special promotion offering a \$4000 houseboat holiday on the Murray River as the prize.

The name of the delighted winner, Elsa Giansiracusa, was drawn at the Council's Wedderburn office in the days following the expo.

## Newbridge opening a thrill for locals

Twenty-seven months after it was destroyed by floods, the Newbridge recreation reserve was officially re-opened on 5 May by Minister for Sport and Recreation Hugh Delahunty.

The official ceremony took place ahead of the day's Loddon Valley Football League round five clash between Newbridge and Mitiamo.

Following the January 2011 floods, Mr Delahunty and Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Development Damian Drum led a Victorian government delegation to inspect the damage.

At that time, Mr Delahunty pledged government support to rebuild the reserve, with \$2.3 million subsequently delivered through the Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund towards the \$3 million restoration project.

The completed works include resurfaced netball and tennis courts, a restored football oval, as well as a new multi-purpose pavilion with space for up to 200 people.

"The pavilion is an exciting addition that includes a function



*Minister Delahunty (middle rear) with members of the official party and Newbridge netballers at the official opening.*

*Courtesy of The Bendigo Advertiser*

space, commercial kitchen and servery, cool room, bar, change rooms, umpires' room, office, medical room and public toilets," Mr Delahunty said at the ceremony.

"Not only will it serve as clubrooms for the town's football and netball teams, but it also gives Newbridge a suitable venue for major events and offers campers improved amenities on the Loddon River.

"Other works include a new tennis clubhouse, upgraded power supply, new scoreboards and goalposts and improved landscaping, fencing and road works."

Mr Drum said that, in addition to the funds from the state government and

generous contributions from Loddon Shire and the Newbridge recreation reserve committee of management, the project would not have been possible without the local community, which contributed \$175,000 worth of labour and materials.

"This was a significant contribution given the personal asset damage many local people suffered during the floods," Mr Drum said.



Bird-watching and cycling are just two of the many avenues open this spring for enjoying Loddon's natural attractions.

## Festival a winner, naturally

Details of this year's *Naturally Loddon – A Wonderland in Spring* festival are now available, revealing fresh events and a longer running time.

Five weeks last year, the 2013 festival now spans eight weeks, from 30 August to 27 October.

Fresh inclusions this year are overnight and day canoe trips, a new Blue Eucy Heritage Festival, a New Age/natural products market day and the annual meeting in Wedderburn of the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria.

Popular events from previous years set to return include photographic displays, field trips, the Kooyoora Wildflower Show,



the Terrick Terrick National Park open weekend, Tarnagulla's family day and bus tours to Loddon Plains and the Boort wetlands.

The festival – now into its fourth year – is aimed at all age groups, with a variety of fun, interactive and educational events.

Tourism Manager Robyn Vella says she believes the event has gained some genuine momentum over the past few years.

"People running events have realised the broader program is drawing visitors to our region," she says.

"If we can work together to market our attractions, it will bring benefits to all the individual events."

**For copies of the Naturally Loddon brochure, contact the Loddon Visitor Information Centre on 5494 3489 or email [loddonvisitorinformation@loddon.vic.gov.au](mailto:loddonvisitorinformation@loddon.vic.gov.au)**

## Work starts on major projects

Millions of dollars will be poured into two much-anticipated infrastructure projects in Loddon Shire over the next six months as work gets under way in earnest at the Bridgewater Caravan Park and Wedderburn Community Centre.

Construction is expected to start on both redevelopments this month, after Council chose the winning tenders at its meeting in late May.

With drainage works complete at Bridgewater, the main contract to install services including sewerage, electricity, water, fire service, irrigation and road works, including kerbing and paths, can now proceed.

Other activities, such as the design of the manager's residence, camp kitchen and amenities building, are well advanced.

Subject to the timing and extent of winter rains, Council plans to have a working park by the end of December.

The value of the current contract is a little over \$1.2 million.

The manager's residence will be started later in the year and remodelling of the existing store shed into a camp kitchen will follow.

Other building works, including four new barbecue shelters, a new amenities building and modifications to the existing amenities



*An artist's impression of the new manager's residence at Bridgewater Caravan Park.*

building and former tennis pavilion, will follow the major civil contract.

Recreation equipment is expected to begin arriving in October.

Meanwhile, at the Wedderburn Community Centre in Wilson St, contractors are expected to be on-site this month to start work on the site's \$1.75 million redevelopment.

When complete, the project will create a community hub and enhanced maternal and child health, tourism and neighbourhood house facilities.

All planning and building approvals have been issued and, all going well, a substantial amount of work should be completed by Christmas.

Services from the centre will continue through the construction period, though many will have to move around on the site for short periods to facilitate the works.

The contractors' brief is to build new consulting rooms from which the Inglewood Health Service will operate, a new tourism office, two interview rooms for visiting services, two improved multi-purpose rooms, new toilet facilities and two new meeting rooms.

The new building will be fully accessible to all.

## Our latest citizens



Mayor Cr Geoff Curnow welcomed eight new Australian citizens during Council's visit to Pyramid Hill for a meeting earlier this year. Frederick and Mary Estrella and Marilyn, Aaron, Allen, Elijah, Julia and Winona Fernandez all come from the Philippines and all currently live in Pyramid Hill.

## Septic checks under way



The sign currently being installed in public toilets across Loddon Shire.

This month, Council starts work on a year-long project investigating the effectiveness of septic systems across the Shire.

Council officers will visit all properties in un-sewered towns and hamlets and those located within 500m of the Loddon River and its tributaries to assess their septic systems.

The project, funded by a grant from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, will gather data to build into an updated Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan.

It expands on an education program begun last year which has resulted in a new series of information sheets about wastewater management for property owners.

Signage is currently being installed in public facilities across the Shire to remind users about correct use of a septic tank.

The Council officer visiting your property will be in uniform and carrying proper identification, ready to offer up-to-date advice on system maintenance.

For more information on the project, please contact Manager Environmental Health Teresa Arnup on 5494 1200.

## Fire Services Levy to change

From 1 July, the way you contribute to Victoria's fire services – the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) – is changing.

Currently, Victoria's fire services are funded by contributions from the state government, metropolitan councils and a levy collected by insurance companies.

After 1 July, the levy will be removed from insurance premiums and collected by councils through their rates notices.

The state government will continue to make a statutory contribution of 12.5 per cent of the MFB budget and 22.5 per cent of the CFA budget to fund the state's fire services.

Under the current arrangements, insurance companies impose the Fire Services Levy on their premiums for building and contents insurance.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found this was unfair because, while all property owners benefit from the fire services, only those who insure contribute to funding them.

Also, because it was at the discretion of insurance companies as to how they recovered costs from policy holders, people with similar properties were charged different amounts depending on their policies and insurer.

Businesses and farms in the CFA area were subject to levies on their insurance premiums which were as high as 95 per cent, plus stamp duty and GST. This discouraged some people from insuring, and drove up the cost for others.

The state government wants a scheme whereby all property owners contribute to the state's fire services, saving more than \$100 million a year for Victorian households and businesses.

After 1 July, each property will pay a fixed component of \$100 for residential properties and \$200 for other properties, plus a levy rate applied to the property's capital improved value.

There will be different rates for different property types, with classes for residential, commercial, industrial, primary production, public benefit and vacant land.

Pensioners and holders of a Department of Veteran Affairs gold card will now receive a \$50 concession per household for a principal place of residence.

Councils will pay the levy on their own properties.

Treasurer Michael O'Brien said last month the current system added stamp duty and GST to building and contents insurance premiums, which only served to raise costs for policy holders.

"The property-based levy will not incur stamp duty or GST," Mr O'Brien said.

"This means a major tax cut for many families and businesses – probably savings of around 20 per cent a year for households – while putting our fire services on a more secure financial footing."

Mr O'Brien said the average household's contribution in a CFA area for fire services was expected to drop from an average of \$262 in 2011/12 (the last full year of the insurance-based levy), to \$142 in 2013/14.

The government has appointed Professor Allan Fels as the state's first independent Fire Services Levy Monitor to oversee the transition to the new arrangements.

A public information campaign is expected to begin this month across a range of media outlets to ensure that property owners are well informed about the change before rates notices are issued in July and August.

For more information, visit [www.firelevy.vic.gov.au](http://www.firelevy.vic.gov.au)



Michael O'Brien

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**FORTHCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Monday 24 June, Newbridge  
Monday 22 July, Serpentine  
Monday 26 August, Inglewood  
Monday 23 September, Serpentine  
Ordinary Council Meetings are open to the public and commence at 3.30pm.

## Your Councillors



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