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Three residents of Loddon Shire were welcomed into Australian citizenship at a ceremony in the Serpentine Council Chambers in late July. Leading the formalities were Federal Member for Murray Dr Sharman Stone and Mayor Cr Geoff Curnow. Pictured are, from left, Dr Stone, Cr Curnow and two of the conferees, Kim Johnson, from Pyramid Hill, and Jennifer Dougall, from Wedderburn.

Where the money's going

Loddon Shire Council intends to press ahead with its busy program of road works, township improvements, Community Planning initiatives and infrastructure projects despite the winding up of generous government funding for flood recovery works.

By the end of June, Council had spent around \$33 million repairing and rebuilding road, bridge, footpath and drainage networks and restoring integral community assets. Flood recovery funding also supported a wide variety of infrastructure projects, township events and community enterprises.

Despite this sharp contraction in revenue, Council has kept this year's general rate increase to 5.5%, the same as last year. Council's financial intentions for the coming 12 months were revealed in its budget for 2013/14, formally adopted by Councillors at their meeting in Newbridge in late June.

On the income side, Council expects to collect \$8.6 million from rates and charges, \$7.1 million in Grants Commission allocations and \$1.5 million in Roads to Recovery funding.

Budgeted expenditure includes a capital works program of \$8.42 million, funded by \$3.85 million from Council operations, \$2.56 million from external grants and contributions, \$919,000 from the sale of assets and the balance of \$1.09 million from reserves.

Of that \$8.42 million, road works will take up \$4 million, land and buildings \$2.7 million and plant and equipment \$1.1 million.

In addition, there is \$2.5 million to be spent on home care services, \$740,000 for township street improvement and streetscapes, \$808,000 on economic development initiatives and full funding of Council's ongoing commitment to community planning of \$750,000.

The capital works program for 2013/14 will see 20km of local road resheets completed, 14.5km of local road shoulder resheets and 3.3km of local road construction.

Council also plans to deliver 5,287km of maintenance grading and further maintenance to the sealed road network of 919km, 212 bridges and major culverts.

Council is planning no new borrowings during the year.

Message from the Mayor

With winter frost and chills now behind us, we are at that stage of the year when we are looking forward with a genuine sense of anticipation to a brighter time ahead.

The dark, damp days are gone and spring sunshine is turning our thoughts to family outings, work in the garden and enjoying the surge of growth we see in nature.

It's a great time of year to be here, too, with the fourth Naturally Loddon festival already well under way. Spread over five weeks last year, the 2013 festival now spans eight weeks, running through until 27 October.

The major events are back and there are some exciting new inclusions, so please pick up a brochure and enjoy what's on offer for all ages.

Council is well and truly on the front foot as well, with the recent adoption of both our latest budget and a bold new Council Plan for the next four years.

As detailed elsewhere in this Bulletin, these two documents have come about after a huge effort by Councillors and Council staff to clarify and spell out our future financial and strategic directions.

In both, we have carefully considered what resources we have at our disposal, where our hopes and priorities lie for the municipality and how best to use those resources to extract the maximum benefit for our people.

As we finally close the book on the stirring stories of the floods of 2010/11, we look forward now to a new chapter of growth, of optimism and new things happening.



Cr Geoff Curnow

Wedderburn Community Centre



Here's how the new Wedderburn Community Centre will look, according to an artist's impression. The \$1.75 million project will deliver a new community hub and enhanced maternal and child health, tourism and neighbourhood house facilities for the district.

There will be new consulting rooms from which the Inglewood and District Health Service (IDHS) 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 redevelopment – due to be completed by the end of the year – has been made possible by the generous support of the state and federal governments. The Wedderburn Community House, IDHS and Council have also been financial contributors.

Where to from here

Loddon Shire has laid down a clear statement of its aims and priorities for the future with the release of its new Council Plan for 2013/17.

The Plan was shaped after extensive analysis, community consultation and an independent assessment of Council and the community's future needs. It was released in draft form for public comment before being formally endorsed at the Council meeting held at Newbridge in late June.

The Plan identifies seven strategic platforms to which Council will devote its energies and resources over the next four years.

These are:

- Supporting townships to build on their individual strengths.
- Capitalising on the demand for lifestyle properties without compromising premium agricultural land or the environment.
- Advocating for the Shire's agrifood sector as the backbone of the local economy.

- Improving the liveability and attractiveness of its towns.
- Boosting business and local employment options.
- Supporting local communities.
- Engaging with youth.

The Council Plan goes on to develop each of these platforms, with clear success indicators, detailed priorities and key projects.

Mayor Cr Geoff Curnow said these seven platforms pointed to where Council could make the biggest difference to the future of the Loddon community.

"Our focus is on strengthening our communities, population growth, economic development, the agrifood sector, our transitioning towns and connecting with the next generation," Cr Curnow said.

"The Plan provides a blueprint for the activities of Loddon Shire employees, spells out the role of this organisation and the areas where we will target our investment and energy."

Town shows its friendly face

Loddon Shire is continuing to roll out the welcome mat for motorhome owners with the announcement that Bridgewater has been officially declared an RV-Friendly Town.

The accolade comes after determined efforts by Council and supportive Bridgewater residents to have a small area of the Bridgewater recreation reserve set up specifically for the needs of recreational vehicle users.

It brings to two the number of RV-Friendly Towns in the Shire, after Wedderburn was approved in 2010 with a site in the Hard Hill reserve.

The push for the facility in Bridgewater sprang from a visit to the town by a friend of local man David Hanna.

"This friend is an RV user and involved in organising caravan rallies," David said.

"We drove around the district and he identified a number of aspects that would be of interest to travellers like himself.

"He suggested the recreation reserve as a suitable site and approved of our wide streets, flat areas for parking and other spaces close to town where numbers of vehicles could gather.

"I think it's really good for the whole Shire – especially once the new caravan park is up and running, it will give visitors plenty of reasons to stop."

Loddon Tourism Manager Robyn Vella said the idea was carried forward by members of the former Bridgewater Progress Association, now known as the Bridgewater on Loddon Development Committee.

"The move was funded by the Bridgewater Community Plan and Loddon Shire and has come about through a joint effort from Council and the local recreation reserve committee," Robyn said.

"Council intends to make Loddon an RV-Friendly Shire, in line with one of the objectives of its Tourism Strategy for 2013-2017.

"Work has started for another site at Pyramid Hill and others at Boort and Inglewood are planned.

"At the recreation reserve, we now have a free campsite for RV users, with its own dump point and tourist information box.

"Up to six visitors can come in, but their vehicles must be fully self-contained, discharge no grey water and stay no longer than 48 hours.

"This is not meant to take income away from our caravan parks – we're providing a facility for another tourism segment which will allow visitors to stay closer to town.

"While there is no charge for using the site, patrons are invited to leave a donation to fund further improvements to the reserve."



Motorhome owners gather at Kandanga, in south-east Queensland. Picture: Jan Keppie

The tag of "RV-Friendly Town" is bestowed after a formal accreditation process by the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, which is based in Newcastle.

With almost 66,000 members operating more than 29,000 motorhomes, the club – the biggest of its kind in Australia – offers motorhome insurance, a monthly magazine, social events through its 97 local chapters, a Solos' Network for members travelling alone and two national rallies a year.

Spokesman Rob Hinton said there were several "must-haves" if a new town was to win accreditation.

"There has to be appropriate parking around shops, short-term parking within 5km of the town, access to drinking water and a free dump point," he said.

"Once an application is accepted, we send out signage and add the name to our website.

"We now have 165 sites around Australia and that number is growing steadily."

Bridgewater Recreation Reserve committee secretary Sue Coghlan said the RV-Friendly Town tag was "a win-win for everyone".

"Any donations we receive will benefit the reserve, extra visitors help the town and the RV owners have somewhere new to stay," she said.

"We've already received one note of thanks from a motorhome owner expressing appreciation for our having the facility open.

"We'd want to acknowledge Council, and Robyn Vella in particular, for making it possible – we're very happy with it."



Two RV users explore Muloorina Station near Lake Frome, east of the northern Flinders Ranges in South Australia.

Picture: Peter Wright

Get your message through

Council has recently adjusted its system for capturing after-hours messages.

If people call to report urgent matters, they are asked to "press 1" to be transferred to the on-call officer.

If the reason for the call is not urgent, they can leave a message and that will be dealt with during office hours.

Please listen carefully to the options given when making such a call and your concerns will be dealt with properly.

Come out to play

Take to the water, play on the land and look to the sky – that's the invitation from organisers of events included in this year's Naturally Loddon festival, which launched for the fourth successive year at the start of this month.

It's appropriate, then, that the opening slot in the 2013 program was taken by Mulwarrie Studios in Bridgewater, with a photographic exhibition entitled "Water, Land and Sky".

That display – pictures of classic landscapes of rural Australia with a special section devoted to the Loddon region – was scheduled to run through to 8 September, with eight more festival events to follow during the month.

Filling five weeks last year, the 2013 program spans eight weeks, running through until 27 October with a total of 20 events spread around the Shire.

New inclusions this year are overnight and day canoe trips on the Loddon River, a revived Blue Eucy Heritage Festival at Inglewood, a bike tour around Wedderburn, a New Age market day at Wedderburn and the annual meeting of the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, featuring an auction of prospecting items, a barbecue and tips from the experts on gold detecting.

Another "first" is the inclusion of the Bridgewater Wool, Wheat and Wine Festival on Sunday 20 October, boasting sheep shearing, a "sheep toss" and sheep races, children's novelty events and more.

Popular events from previous years set to return include several photographic displays, field trips, the Kooyoora Wildflower Show, bird-watching, the Terrick Terrick National Park open weekend, Tarnagulla's family day and bus tours to Loddon Plains and the Boort wetlands.

The program, which is organised by Council's Tourism Department in league with its festival partners, is aimed at all age groups, with a variety of fun, interactive and educational events.

Copies of the festival program are available at tourist and retail outlets across the Shire, through the Loddon Visitor Information Centre on 5494 3489 or by visiting www.loddon.vic.gov.au



Cycling, walking and boating are just a few of the bracing activities on offer during this year's Naturally Loddon festival.

Two for the diary

Two new and innovative social events planned for later this year will add a dash of extra vitality to their hosting towns.

Bridgewater plans to celebrate its home-grown primary industries, while Boort is opting for a touch of glamour with its inaugural Luncheon by the Lake.

Scheduled for Sunday 20 October, from 11am to 3pm, Bridgewater's Wool, Wheat and Wine Festival will feature speed shearing, sheep tossing, sheaf tossing, wine tasting, local produce, art displays, camel rides, showbags and plenty of children's entertainment.

For more details, phone Jenny Hosking, from the Bridgewater Development Committee, on 5437 3198.

Boort's Luncheon by the Lake is planned for Sunday 3 November, during Melbourne Cup weekend.

Patrons will enjoy a four-course seated lunch, showcasing local wines and produce, while listening to a jazz band on the foreshore of Little Lake Boort.

For more details, phone Boort Tourism Group president Kathryn Lanyon on 0427 288 889.

Seniors to cook up a storm

Older people around the state have some entertaining treats coming their way when the 31st Victorian Seniors Festival comes to life.

The festival program runs all month, but includes a dedicated week of events in Melbourne and in regional centres across the state, with free public transport for seniors from 6-13 October.

Here in Loddon Shire, Seniors Week is a great opportunity for our valued older citizens to get out and enjoy themselves.

Funding for the Shire's activities has been shared with the Victorian government, with \$2,600 coming from the Department of Health and \$5,000 from Council.

The celebrations kick off with two mystery trips, planned for Tuesday 1 October and the following Monday.

There is a charge for these outings, but pick-ups will be arranged in Bridgewater, Inglewood and Serpentine and lunch is included each day.

The official launch will take place on Wednesday 9 October at Serpentine Hall from 11am to 2.30pm. There'll be a delicious lunch to share, courtesy of Council, plus some informative speakers and live music to enjoy.

A variety of community and information stalls will also be on hand. Limited transport is available, so please get in touch with our Serpentine office if this would be a help.

The following week, our highly successful Senior Master Chef competition will be back for a second year.

Planned for Tuesday 15 October at Inglewood Primary School, the day will feature some healthy eating tips from Kate Finegan, of Bendigo Health, before the competition heats up between our rival teams.

Chefs and spectators are all welcome – please book your place early.

For enquiries or bookings for any of the above, please phone the Serpentine office on 5437 7999.

Grants get things going



Lighting is the next project in store for the new multi-use courts at Calivil.

Fifty community groups in Loddon Shire have had some exciting news recently with the approval by Council of its latest rounds of Community Planning and Community Grants Scheme funding.

Twelve projects won grants totalling \$210,000 under Council's Community Planning guidelines, while 38 applicants were allocated a total of just over \$197,600 under the Community Grants Scheme.

Over and above all this, \$10,400 was given to the organisers of 20 community events scheduled for the July to December period through Council's Events Sponsorship Scheme.

In the 2013/14 financial year, Community Plan funding is based on a \$50,000 allocation for each of the five wards, plus a further \$500,000 set aside for strategic projects.

Add in the \$200,000 reserved for Council's Community Grants Scheme and that makes \$950,000 put aside each year for community-based projects and infrastructure improvements.

The way Community Planning funding works is by directly allocating money to projects spelt out in local community plans, facility master plans or partnerships between communities within the ward.

Projects to win support this year include the gym extension at BRIC at Boort, planning for streetscape improvements in five towns, repairs and other works at the Bridgewater Memorial Hall, lights for the new multi-use courts at Calivil and restumping work at the Pyramid Hill Memorial Hall.

The Community Grants Scheme, on the other hand, operates by local sporting and community groups applying for funding help for particular development ideas.

The program began in 2000/01 and, since then, has seen about \$1.1 million allocated to 565 community-based projects worth a total of around \$4.5 million.

Last year, Council doubled its annual allocation to this scheme to \$200,000, boosted the maximum grant available from \$5000 to \$10,000 and lifted its ratio of support to \$2 for each single dollar raised by the applicant.

The events sponsorship scheme, dating from 1999, has resulted in more than \$172,000 going to community groups to help promote events held within the municipality.

Enrol your child now

Enrolments for 2014 in Loddon Shire's five Council-run pre-schools close on Monday 30 September for their four-year-old groups. Expressions of interest are also invited for groups for three-year-olds.

If your child will be three or four years of age by 30 April 2014, please contact Loddon Shire's Early Years Department for enrolment advice.

Applications will still be received after 30 September, but these may not be considered in the first round of offers for places.

Enrolment forms are available from Council Offices in Wedderburn and Serpentine or from your local pre-school or Maternal and Child Health Centre. Alternatively, email your request to preschools@loddon.vic.gov.au or visit www.loddon.vic.gov.au

For phone enquiries, please contact the Early Years Department on 5437 7999.

New faces join the team

Two new staff members have joined Council's Community Wellbeing team, as one of our more familiar faces has moved off to a new role elsewhere.

Sue Thomas joined Council as Early Years Officer and, from last August, helped develop the revamped role of Early Years Coordinator. Sue finished up with Council in July and has now taken up a new position at Echuca Health.

Rebecca Curren is our new Early Years Coordinator, responsible for maternal and child health services, pre-schools and Council's immunisation program.

Rebecca comes to the post after time as a community mental health worker in Castlemaine and as children's services coordinator (education) at Campaspe Shire. A qualified social worker, her previous work experience also includes stints in foster care management, child protection and family services of different kinds.

Kathryn Sheridan has been appointed to the newly-created position of Care Coordination and Quality Team Leader, focused on our Home and Community Care clients.



Kathryn Sheridan (left) and Rebecca Curren

Kathryn's background is in nursing, with experience in district nursing, aged care and community health.

She will work with the assessment team and act as a contact point between clients, other services and community care workers.

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FORTHCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Monday 23 September, Serpentine
Monday 28 October, Boort
Monday 25 November, Serpentine
Monday 9 December, Serpentine

Ordinary Council Meetings are open to the public and commence at 3.30pm.

Your Councillors



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