

KORONG VALE COMMUNITY PLAN

A BRIEF HISTORY

Korong Vale is a small town at the centre of the Shire of Loddon on the main road between the townships of Wedderburn and Boort. The original town common was set up on the site of a long established and at that time still inhabited aboriginal encampment on the banks of the Korong Creek near the all ready existing settlement of Kinipanyule. This common is now the site of the Korong Vale Golf Course, but was once also the site of two churches and adjacent paddocks were the sites of the first school and a butter factory. Although Europeans had been grazing sheep in the district since the 1840's, it was not until the 1870's that the original pastoral leases started to be broken up and selected. Soon after this to serve the needs of the selectors the rail line from Eaglehawk was extended and had already reached Korong Vale by 1883. Subsequently Korong Vale became the confluence of two rail lines that serviced the agrarian expansion into the mallee to the north and as such became for a time a centre of great significance. The Second Station built at this time was equivalent in scale to the station at Bendigo and its marshalling yards rivalled those of Spencer Street. At it's peek the town boasted 3 bakers, two butchers two Hotels, two general stores, church buildings of 4 denominations, 3 blacksmith shops a draper a fruit shop a boot maker a barber an undertaker timber-merchant several boarding houses a private hospital, attendant and itinerant physicians, a cinema and it's own newspaper (the Lance). As well as all the other services that one would expect to be associated with such a centre. The lack of functional roads up till as late as the 1960's kept Korong Vale in work but in the late 1980's. Improved and accessible road transport coupled with a declining rural population hammered the last nail into the coffin of an industry that had become an anachronism. Although the rail lines running through the town carry a huge tonnage of agricultural produce from the north and it appears that this will remain so well into the future, at the moment not one person in the town is employed by the rail industry. When Korong Vale became a post industrial town, apart from the small farming population and a few other exceptions the towns population was dependent on unemployment benefits and various other forms of government support. Not only had the town lost its main source of employment (and to some extent a great deal of it's Identity) but other services such as banking education and a police presence were withdrawn and for a short time the town had no retailers at all! Recently things have stabilised and in some measure, due to agribusiness developments to the north of the town and some small scale business developments in other proximity's and its position relative to Melbourne and Bendigo. Now Korong Vale seems destined to be caught up in the slow but inevitable population spill off from these two urban centres.

THE COMMITTEE

On Monday 6th of October 2003 at the Korong Vale Bowling Club. The Shire of Loddon convened a public meeting. Cr Gavin Holt and C.E.O. Craig Niemann were attendant along with 25 members of the Korong Vale community for the purposes of launching the Korong Vale aspect of the Shire of Loddon Community Plan Process Such that a dialogue be established via the means of a committee drawn from the community to address the communities needs and aspirations and also in such a way lend weight to council in its negotiations with relevant bodies in the implementation and lobbying for such.

Those attending the meeting formed themselves into four groups at four tables and drafted the following priorities to be addressed by council:-

Table 1.

- *Drainage
(the town now has a lot of blocked and residual stormwater drains full of grey water and septic overflow that present a health risk and obnoxious odours)
- *Footpaths
- *Mechanics Institute restoration
- *Railway reservoir maintenance and value assessment.
- *Widening of Borung road.
- *Mobile Phone Coverage.

Table 2.

- *Improved medical service (doctor access).
- *Improved water Quality and reliability (Warranga water access)
- *Drainage
- *Tree planting
- *Mobile Phone Coverage.
- *Cemetery Maintenance

Table 3.

- *Drainage
- *Improved water Quality and reliability
- *Improved medical service (doctor access).
- *Footpaths
- *Widening of Borung road.
- *Cemetery Maintenance

Table 4.

- *Drainage
- *Improved medical service (doctor access).
- * Improved Ambulance service access
- *Footpaths
- *Widening of Borung road.
- *Cemetery Maintenance

At the end of this process a committee was nominated and resolved to meet at the same place at 7.30pm 28 10 03.

At the October 28 meeting the group submissions were discussed and prioritised by the members of the committee with occasional advice and input from Cr. Holt

It was decided that this document should be produced to describe the aspirations and concerns of the of the towns folk as far as the committee was able, and these aspirations and concerns would be tabled in two groups:-

- (a) Those that could be directly addressed by council
- (b) Those that could not be directly addressed by Council but would be furthered by our supportive documentation if and when Council negotiates with government departments and other bodies corporate.

(a).
DRAINAGE

It was clear from the first meeting that drainage was the overwhelming issue that presented itself to the inhabitants of Korong Vale. Members of the committee discussed how members of the community had been in dialogue and expressing concern about the state of drains since 1976. It is only fair to say that in this period. Council has done some work on some of the drains about the town but that not all of these works have had successful outcomes. The main drainage issue in the town relates to grey water which accumulates in drainage ditches and large puddles at various places around the town. The drain along the access lane between Greig and Gibson Streets is probably the worst of these (see photographs 01 and 02). Council did some work deepening this drain to the north end such that it would be more able to flow that way and get away from dwellings into ponds in the rail yards this may have addressed the situation in the short term and made a first step toward future work but because this is a small unlined drain that cannot be flushed without causing erosion problems grey water has been able to accumulate behind dwellings along this lane posing a health risk to people living in both streets.



Photo 01



Photo 02

Apart from one piece of drain work along the access lane that runs behind residences on the north side on Vernon Street, all of the drains in the town are open. The small aforementioned covered drain has not been a success because it is more often than not blocked with leaf litter and silt. Korong Vale has a mix of drain types ranging from small to large brick and concrete lined ditches to a large canal type of structure constructed by the railways and running from under Rinders Lane behind some dwellings and out across Vernon Street into Korong Creek. (this very large drain is chocked with weeds and silt and has large stagnant grey water ponds in it). (photographs 03 and 04).



Photo 03



Photo 04

Cr Holt was able to advise the Committee that Council was involved in negotiations with Vic Track to purchase land in the rail yards to establish a collecting and filtering pond for planned drainage work for the town and that work will not be able to commence until this matter has been negotiated and settled.

THE MECHANICS INSTITUTE HALL

(photographs 05,06 and 07)

The committee recognised that the Mechanics Hall is a building of great significance in the town and despite the efforts of hall committees over the years parts of the building (due mainly to weathering and fungal infection) have fallen into disrepair. Members of the committee understand that the Hall requires work that would be beyond the annual maintenance grant and fund raising but never the less felt that the restoration of this very attractive building, which is very much a part of the towns identity, would be a great moral boost for the community as well as a memorable, iconic and positive feature of the town.

The committee also thought that if renovated the Mechanics Hall would make a positive impression on visitors or prospective residents especially when many other parts of the town are afflicted with decay.

The committee was of the opinion that even though the hall was under-utilised it was important that it be renovated such that when members of the community organised to engage in cultural activities it would be available and that if it were not available activities that would benefit the cultural health of the town would become missed opportunities.

Recently council engaged a carpenter and an electrician to do some work to allow the installation of computers in one of the front rooms of the hall. When these tradesmen were engaged several windows along the north wall of the Hall had been vandalised and the frames of these were also either broken or subject to fungal decay. Instead of these windows being repaired they were boarded over the result being most unsatisfactory. Our committee agrees that these as well as windows at the rear of the hall should be replaced with appropriate glass and frames.

It was noted that fluorescent light fittings have been installed in the main chamber of the hall and incandescent light fittings with white glass shades have been removed.

The result is entirely out of character with the heritage status of the building and a retrograde and inappropriate measure.

It is also noted the shades of the fittings removed are of considerable value. These fittings should be reinstalled.

Over the years some significant changes have been made to the building that make it less safe and also compromise its utility. One of the most significant alterations was the removal of a load bearing wall that held up the projection box above and separated the front room of the hall from the main chamber. Traditionally the smaller rooms of the Hall were used as meeting rooms each of these having an open fireplace which made them comfortable in the winter. High well ventilated ceilings made them cool and comfortable in warmer weather. The fireplace in the front room of the hall is futile because of the missing wall and double doors. The meeting room at the back of the hall has had its fireplace and chimney removed. This room also served as a dressing room for theatrical productions having a door opening onto the stage, this room was also used as the meeting place of the Korong Vale RSL. This room has also had its rear entrance steps removed leaving a metre and half drop from door to ground.

For health and safety reasons it is important that public halls have an adequate number of exits and the absence of these steps as well as the door, exterior platform and steps that lead directly off and onto the hall stage should be reinstalled to preserve the utility of the building.

Other works that would add amenity to the building would be the extension of paving to the door on in the middle of the north side of the hall (to prevent the ingress of soil on the dance floor) and the removal of very large accumulations of birds nest from the roof cavities.



Photo 05



Photo 06



Photo 07

FOOTPATHS

The committee was not unanimous as to whether the town needed its footpaths repaired. It was noted that In Vernon Street most of the granite sand foot paths that once existed outside the front fence of the houses there had disappeared but the informal track that remained was still quite navigable for most pedestrians.

Other streets in the town seem to have never had any formal footpaths and Allen Street had adequate paving in front of the main business area.

At the same time it was conceded that many of these paths were not of a standard compatible with prams or pushers and that some elderly and frail residents would find some parts of the town less accessible.

TREES

The committee commended recent efforts with regard to tree planting by council throughout the township and expressed the desire that more planting be undertaken to provide shade and shelter in parts of the town where there this amenity is absent.

It was suggested that the western side of Allen Street near the old station car park as well as the western sides of Gibson and Grieg Streets would benefit from more tree planting and that deciduous varieties be employed where possible so that winter sun would not necessarily be blocked when needed. It was noted that Vernon Street had not recovered from the unfortunate bicentennial project that council implemented in 1988 where at least 20 very large mature grey box trees were removed. Taken into account that trees of this type take at least 80 years to mature it is no surprise that the street has nowhere near the visual appeal or amenity it once had but it is also gratifying to know that such abuses of the environment are now prohibited by law!

It was also noted that another unfortunate outcome of this project was that planting of shrubs and bushes were in open parts of the streetscape whereas all trees were planted directly under power lines meaning that they will all require regular pruning. This is a sad state of affairs indeed when one takes into account that originally the power lines ran along the road verge such that street lights hung over and lit the carriageway and the very large trees that were removed shaded the whole street without any maintenance requirements

The committee noted that the Korong Vale Neighbourhood Group has plans and funding for a community arts Development at 24 Allen Street. Which includes tree planting and the purchase of land from Vic Track at that site and recommended that this project be given council support.

RAILWAY RESERVOIR

(Photographs 08-24).

Part of Korong Vale’s Heritage as a “Railway Town” is the disused “Railway Reservoir” on the edge of the “Flora and Fauna Reserve” west sou west of the township.

Heritage Consultants engaged by the Shire of Korong (just before amalgamation with the Shire of Loddon) identified the reservoir and its aqua ducts as the largest single engineering effort apart from track laying ever undertaken by the Victorian Railways The reservoir has sufficient capacity such that when its bank ruptured in 1930 something like a small tidal wave described as being in places “one foot deep” engulfed low lying parts of the town.

The reservoir was established by the railways to provide water for it’s steam trains but was abandoned in the mid 1960’s when steam locomotives were replaced with diesel and it was found that water from the new reservoirs built on the Lonsdale system to service both Wedderburn and Korong Vale, had water with less clay dissolved in it.

In this way the railways was able to save the cost of the maintenance of both the reservoir and its aqua ducts including several sluices and water mains for regulating it’s affluence’s and effluence’s. Before the system was abandoned the aqua ducts (Large contour catchment channels that run up to 10 km to the north and south of the reservoir) were maintained to facilitate flows, such that a conventional automobile could be driven along them when water was not flowing through them. Since then the aqua ducts have been eroded and choked with vegetation. The spillway that carries the reservoir’s overflow has been undercut by erosion and the road/track along the top of the dam wall has been compromised by some irresponsible motorcyclists cutting a deep track into the face of the dam wall.

The reservoir is positioned such that its water can be gravity fed into the town itself or to most of the flat land to its east and could be used for watering stock limited irrigation and for flushing the proposed town drainage system or used much in the same way that Wedderburn uses water from the “Skinners Flat Reservoir”.

The committee noted that If such a reservoir were to be constructed today it would cost many millions of dollars and that the maintenance and utilisation of such a public asset would add value to the community in greater proportion than the investment made and accordingly asks council to undertake an appraisal study of the system and report back to the community its findings.



Photo 08



Photo 09



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18



Photo 19



Photo 20



Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24

(b)

THE BORUNG ROAD

(Photograph 25.)

The committee recognised that the Borung Road was a cause for great concern in the community in those places where it is a single carriage way and has very abrupt shoulders giving way to loose gravel and noted that this road is used increasingly by large and heavy trucks and workers commuting to and from work at Boort as well as a high volume of wide load trucks carrying very large on farm silos into the wheat belt to the north. The committee noted that although not many accidents seem to have been reported on this stretch that anecdotal evidence of many near misses were common and tragedy was very much waiting in the wings.

The committee resolved to express support for council recommending to Vic Roads that work on this section of the road be made a priority.



Photo 25

MEDICAL SERVICES

Some concern was expressed by members of the committee that Doctors were no longer in attendance at the citizens centre and that the Ambulance service took so long to get here and this situation be improved.

COMMUNICATIONS

Concern was expressed by members of the committee that Mobile Phone coverage was absent in many parts of the town causing inconvenience that was remarkable considering that the community was not thought of as remote.

It was noted that Korong Vale has an optic fibre telecommunications cable running through the town reserve and that this may offer the possibility of Broad Band Internet Access which may facilitate future economic development in the community.

WATER QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY

In the 1950's a Reservoir was established at Korong Vale to service the town itself and Wedderburn, water being drawn for this purpose from the Lonsdale channel. The water from this system is described as "Hard" because the Lonsdale channel traverses Limestone country this hardness and the recent addition of chlorine makes the water. A very poor substitute for rainwater in the garden. (It has been suggested that the water "burns" certain plants).

In recent times the quality of the water has not been as much of a problem as its availability, both communities falling foul of almost continuous restrictions on use. Cr Holt suggested that council had looked at the possibility of drawing water from the much more copious Waranga system (even though this water would have to be pumped into the reservoir and taken from the east side of the Loddon River to avoid the salt that it sends into the Warranga at its confluence). The Lonsdale channel is a much smaller supply but has the advantage of being a gravity fed or passive system and is scheduled to be progressively replaced with pipe, which would save the estimated 200% wastage that now occurs due to seepage and evaporation. (This would probably lessen the needs for restrictions in the system).

After discussing these issues the committee acknowledged that water policy was a significant but complex issue, but all the same consistent availability of quality water should be a priority for any community.

CONCLUSION

At this committee's last meeting on the 16th of February a draft of this document was submitted for discussion and approval. There was some discussion of the limited time that was available for drafting a document that was attempting to express the aspirations of the community for a ten year period. In light of this there was a suggestion that some consideration be given to the type of developments would be appropriate in the community. A committee member suggested that Korong Vale's quietude was one of the town's most attractive features and that the preservation of this be a clearly stated aspiration of the community.

It was noted that with a population of less than 200 residents disadvantaged by the loss of one of its main industries and the withdrawal of a police presence Korong Vale is a vulnerable community that has been identified as having a high level of socioeconomic disadvantage. Despite this the town has some success stories such as the fact that for the last three years the Dux of Wedderburn College has been a student from Korong Vale.

Such a small community is at a distinct political disadvantage as far as lobbying for its own needs but the committee feels that Council should be able to take advantage of such things as the Fr Tony Vinsons recent survey for Jesuit Social services. In its pursuit of funding to provide for the needs of our community and turn our perceived disadvantage into an opportunity.