

Community Conversations Talking Points

22 June 2023 – Sprent / Castra / Nietta / Abbotsham

Mayor Cheryl Fuller hosted a Community Conversation at the Sprent Community Hall on Thursday 22 June 2023 where residents of Sprent, Castra, Nietta, Abbotsham and surrounds enjoyed morning tea and an informal chat on local issues.

Conversation talking points are below:

Has the Council ever given an undertaking to not selling assets without consultation with the community?

The Mayor advised that there are obligations that need to be met before we can sell public assets. It would need to be advertised that the Council had intent to sell and enable the community to put in any objections before Council could decide. The Council would ensure that community consultation took place to see what the residents would like done with these spaces. It is important to understand that community needs change, and this change involves renewing assets and infrastructure. It is important that we provide facilities and services that are fit for purpose.

Would the Council look at increasing the use of halls by reducing rent and insurance?

That would be a conversation that would need to be had by the Councillors and it would need to be ensured that there was equity across all Council halls. It should be noted that if this caused a reduction in income through the users not paying for part of the costs, then the whole cost would need to be met by all ratepayers through their rates.

What is the latest on the North Motton Pony Club?

The Council has not asked the Club to relocate to Batten Park and there is nothing on the Council's agenda currently to do so.

What if the Sprent Hall was redeveloped into housing developments and there is then no space down the track for emergency management, i.e. usage of the hall for any natural disasters?

This is a reason why we have advised that we consult with the community prior to any decisions being made.

The Mayor acknowledged the topic of Meadway Mutts, and the Director Community Services spoke to the topic.

While investigating noise complaints last year, the Council discovered that Meadway Mutts did not have appropriate Planning Permits. As a result, the Council asked the operator to lodge a Development Application with a view to making their use of the land lawful, including compliance with the Tasmanian Planning Scheme's Attenuation Code. The Attenuation Code aims to minimise adverse impacts that a use may have on others, such as noise and odour. While a Development Application was lodged, the applicant withdrew it after Council staff advised that the application did not satisfactorily address these issues.

The Council has a legal obligation to enforce the Tasmanian Planning Scheme and a moral obligation to address substantiated complaints received from members of our community. As such, when the Development Application was withdrawn, the Council provided Meadway Mutts with 28 days to cease Domestic Animal Breeding, Boarding or Training use in those areas for which an appropriate Planning Permit had not been issued. The Director acknowledged Meadway Mutts' cooperation in complying with that requirement and reinforced the willingness of staff to sit down and talk to the business owner about their future plans and the process for lodging a new Development Application.

A member of the public stated how challenging it was 17 years ago to comply with Council regulations, being passed around Departments and no clear information being given.

The General Manager advised that in the last 15 years a lot of effort has gone into improving Departmental communication and challenges and to provide better advice to the community.

A member of the public advised that she went to the Council with an issue and was told she is too far out of town, and they did not want to know about it.

The General Manager asked the member to provide her with this information after the formal conversation.

A member of the public advised that the Council are required to check kennels every 3 years and hers have not been checked in 17 years.

The Director Corporate Services is taking that on notice and is going to investigate the rules and regulations.

The Principal of Sprent Primary School wanted to flag some issues such as a lack of before and after school care. Sprent Primary School values the agri-science and food and fibre initiatives and that is enticing out of area students, but it is a barrier that they cannot offer the before and after school care. How can the Council help the School address these issues? Including lack of transport and access?

The Director Community Services advised that Ulverstone Childcare Centre and our Outside School Hours Care services are at capacity and nationally, the sector is finding it hard to attract staff at the moment. The Director is going to have a conversation with the Principal after the meeting about any steps that can be taken and options that can be explored.

A member of the public asked if staff shortages are due to vaccination requirements?

The Council does not enforce all staff to be vaccinated for COVID-19 but have a safety plan in place which all staff are required to comply with (vaccination is not one of the requirements).

Two members of the public commended the Council for the assistance provided during the floods. They stated that for a few weeks after flooding there was significant water run off on the road, the staff member came up very promptly when she called, and they suggested that a drain across the road be installed to divert the water run-off where people are not going to be impacted. Noted that they are currently struggling to get out of their driveway.

The Director Infrastructure Services acknowledged the issue and will take the information after the meeting to assist in addressing these issues.

Is there new legislation that the Council will be able to enforce the fencing of creeks and bush area on private property?

Leonie Hiscutt MLC advised she was not aware of any legislation and will touch base with the member of the public that asked this question.

Is the rate rise of 4.4% sustainable?

Yes, it is. The Council's finances are in a good position. We are still covering all expenses. FOGO has assisted in the Council being able to keep rates lower as we have had less waste going into landfill which has an impact on reducing the Waste Levy charge that the Council is required to pay to the State Government.

If the operating budget is for a slight surplus does this mean the Council has no debt? Are we cash positive?

The Council is expected to have approx. \$11m in borrowings by the end of June 2024 after having allowed for up to \$2m in borrowings throughout the 2023-2024 year if needed for stormwater upgrades at Bertha Street in Ulverstone.

The Council's debt is at a manageable level in context of its overall financial assets and cash position. The Council's infrastructure alone is expected to be worth \$544m as at 30 June 2024 and cash on hand around \$10m. The Tasmanian Audit Office publish financial sustainability indicators and provide benchmarks for sustainability. The Council is well within the borrowing parameters set by the Audit Office and therefore able to demonstrate sustainable debt levels. Debt is a valid funding source for new infrastructure.

What is the latest update on Council amalgamations?

The Council had a workshop last night on different community catchment scenarios provided by the government; Central Coast maintained the position that we are happy to talk about change, but we need to be clear with what our tasks are – Central Coast believes more information is needed before a decision should be made.

I think there should be money set aside for guard railing and warning signs, it can be foggy, and the corners can sneak up on you very quickly, main concern is "S" bend on Top Gawler Road near Picketts Road – who can I talk to about that?

The Council has had a major program on guideposts among rural roads, signage has been on the list for several years but the Council first needs to do an audit on the existing signs. Please advise us of missing or damaged signs so that they can be replaced. Top Gawler Road in the vicinity of Picketts Road will be investigated for improvement. The Director Infrastructure Services also advised that crashes not attended by emergency services can be self-reported to Tasmania Police via their website. Crash information is then more accurate and can help us to know where black spot issues are.

What is happening with the trees that are falling on to the roads? They are near the Castra tip.

The Director Infrastructure Services asked for more accurate information on the locations. If it is the Council's responsibility the trees can be assessed. If it is Forestry or private property we can notify them.

Thank you to all of the community members who participated.