

# Councillors' feedback...feedback...feedback



Barry Thompson

Eve and I attended the Woodford Folk Festival over 6 days between Christmas and New Year. We've attended roughly every third Festival since the early 90s so we regard ourselves as regulars. This year our elder

daughter and her family were with us for the first time. It was delightful to see their reactions of wonder and appreciation for the great variety of talent, ethnic food from many nations and cultural diversity on display. The Festival is particularly keen to attract families and the range of entertainments and activities that they offer for younger folk is stunning. It is all great community-building work – a pity that it occurs 1000 kms from Sydney at the back of QLD's Sunshine Coast!

The Festival offers two streams that go beyond entertainment. In the *Greenhouse Stage*, issues of interest this year were (1) the perceived failure of the Greenhouse Gas Abatement White Paper to provide leadership in tackling emissions and the inadequacy of incentives for the likes of power generators and users to improve their operations and (2) the changes wrought by Queensland's Council amalgamations just one year ago.

The urgency of **climate change issues** was reinforced – the globe is tracking the upper limit of the range of temperature and sea level outcomes predicted in the early 90's. I will continue to press all our governments for action. Sure, current economic woes need to be addressed – but in such a way that we do not just end up where we

came from. The world needs new jobs, and many authorities say that energy sourced renewably will create more jobs than the ones lost in our fossil fuel industries. In relation to local government, it seems to me that size does matter. Larger local government units are better placed to work with and/or contest decisions made at State level. If ever Australia is to shed a level of government (not in my lifetime!), in my view, it will be by enlarging and empowering local government to work directly with the national level. Queensland has joined Victoria in moving in that direction.

The second stream, *Radiance*, covered wellness topics ranging through nutrition, from depleted minerals in our agriculture lands to unbalanced diets, to connections between lifestyle and fitness; to pesticides, preservatives, airborne pollutants and other agents and their possible connections to metabolic responses, over the full range of auto-immune diseases from asthma to chronic fatigue; and not to mention the impacts of prescription and non-prescription drugs.

I again came away with the view that the State health system gives these issues far too little prominence. It has its hands more than full dealing with disease and the pressing problems of patients unaware of or unwilling to admit the possibility of their contribution to their own sickness. My question is whether Council should be addressing these issues as part of its sustainability and community services programs. I feel I need to increase my efforts to put this view to my colleagues.

Despite the foregoing, I did manage also to enjoy the performances of a great number of the artists present. I was also delighted by my family's enthusiasm for the event – seems it will

be hard to keep them away next year!

Major issues for 2009 are becoming apparent, including the Department of Local Government's requirements for Councils to set up integrated planning and internal audit systems. No doubt, more challenges will appear for Council and for all of us. More on how we cope next Gazette.

[barry.thompson@willoughby.nsw.gov.au](mailto:barry.thompson@willoughby.nsw.gov.au) or on 9412 1596 (phone/fax).



Kate Lamb

KUNG HEI FAT CHOY!  
GONG XI FAR TSAI!

A happy and successful New Year to all Gazette readers!

Despite the huge challenges looming globally, I can't help but feel that

our hopes for the future have been given a real boost by the remarkable turn of events in America. Barack Obama is certainly a great communicator, his life experience is broad and he seems to not only want to bring people together, but to have the capacity to do just that. Apparently he was born in the Year of the Ox so let's hope that's a good omen!

Council once again partnered with the Chinese Cultural Centre to welcome in the New Year on Saturday 31st January in Chatswood Mall.

2009 will be a busy year for Council. Despite having had no 'road testing', the new Housing Code is due for introduction at the end of

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February (see my Blog, November 5). This will be followed by the introduction of Frank Sartor's planning 'reform' (see April 3 Blog!). In essence, the changes subvert and/or supplant the planning role of local Councils - requisitioning their resources (staff and funding) in doing so. Willoughby will be exhibiting a new Local Environment Plan (LEP) and developing a 10 year financial and asset management plan. A more exciting project (from my point of view) will be creating the business plan for Civic Place, including how the performance spaces will be used - by commercial and community users.

In Artarmon, we are taking your interest in sustainability seriously with a couple of key projects. We aim to get our local transport project off the ground by mid year. At the first Traffic Committee meeting for the year, we were advised that the free 25 seater bus shuttle will initially operate over a fixed loop route throughout the day, servicing the Industrial Area from St Leonards Station. Bus Zones/Stops are proposed every 200m in Herbert and Frederick Streets, Reserve Road, Campbell and Clarendon Sts, Hotham Parade and then the Highway, back to St Leonards. When the Gore Hill Technology Park reaches occupation stage an extra leg on the route will be added via Campbell St, through the Spine Road of the Technology Park and left onto the Pacific Highway again. I am hoping that Artarmon Station will, in due course, become part of the route too.

The **Artarmon Library Redevelopment** is also set to get underway, with a DA being lodged before the end of 2009. Last year we advertised for Expressions of Interest for an architect to work with a local reference group in developing the Masterplan and over 30 responses were received. Council's officers have been assessing these and will have a recommendation to us in February. Although we could have wished for a little more community involvement in this process, the Councillors' intention is that this be maximised from now on and that the principles of sustainability will underpin every aspect of the new facility. We are very fortunate in having the dedicated and skilled members of Artarmon's Sustainability Street Group wanting to play a significant role in this project.

Visit my blog - [www.katelamb.blogspot.com](http://www.katelamb.blogspot.com) ■



Stuart Coppock

The calendar has ticked over to a new year, so I wish all readers a prosperous and safe 2009; it certainly is shaping up to be quite interesting.

In December 2008, Council's auditor suggested that in the current financial environment it would be prudent to have all investments and loans of the Council reviewed. As a result, a point of contention has arisen amongst Councillors and Council officers in relation to the quarterly CPI indexed loan of \$30m over 40 years for the Civic Place project, in particular.

The advice to Councillors at the time the loan was authorised was that inflation was expected to be about 3.17%. The historical rate for the past 40 years has been 5.7% and Council officers seem to be asserting that this inflation rate is too

high for the next 40 years. Certainly Councillors were told that since 1993, Australia's annual CPI inflation rate has averaged 2.5% in line with the Reserve Bank's operating objective of annual CPI inflation within a 2% to 3% target band. Councillors were also advised given the monetary policy of the Reserve Bank, there is an extremely low likelihood of annual inflation pushing outside the 2-3% annual range for any prolonged period. Clearly this position may now have altered.

Whilst inflation has dropped recently, the structure of the quarterly CPI index loan picks up inflation spikes far more readily than if it was based on an annualised average. In my opinion the prudent thing is to review the financial instruments suggested by the Council's auditor in December 2008, the indexed loan being one of these.

Council has also created a new role of Research and Corporate Planning Officer, to coordinate the General Manager's move towards Integrated Planning. This will incorporate all of our existing strategies and plans, along with a 10 year Financial Plan and a detailed Asset Management Plan. The GM has advised one of the opportunities with the creation of this role is developing better links between divisions and adopting a more holistic approach to Council's operations.

In addition, Council will also be developing a Community Engagement strategy. This will provide all divisions with a thoroughly developed scope for community consultation. The GM said: "A more coordinated approach to consultation will help us to share information across Council, avoid duplication of consultation and ensure that we engage with our target groups in the most appropriate and relevant manner."

Other projects Council will be working on over the next 12 months include:

- Development and exhibition of Council's Recreation Plan. The first draft is expected in March, with public consultation during the second quarter.
- Public exhibition of the new LEP, which will commence following the Department of Planning's approval for exhibition.
- Implementation of the new Housing Code, which comes into effect on 27 February 2009. This will have a substantial impact

on how our Building and Planning sections operate and will require a great deal of community education. We will also be implementing the other planning reforms such as Planning Arbitrators, Joint Regional Planning Panels and DA monitoring reports.

- Production of an updated Business Plan for Civic Place (first draft by mid year). This will incorporate all operational costs, expected incomes, asset replacement allowances and loan repayments. It will also detail how the performance venues will operate and how commercial use will be integrated with community use to ensure the venues are viable, well utilised and the retail sites profitable.
- Childcare options to be examined following ABC Learning fallout. Council will keep a watching brief on the centres currently earmarked for sale (Chatswood (2) and Roseville (1)).
- e.restore3 projects to be reviewed to ensure that ratepayers are getting the maximum benefits from the levy.

[stuart.coppock@willoughby.nsw.gov.au](mailto:stuart.coppock@willoughby.nsw.gov.au) ■



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