

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



I have just returned from this year's annual conference of the Local Government Association (LGA) in Shoalhaven

and thrilled to announce Willoughby together with the Tweed Shire are this year's winners of the **AR Bluett Memorial Award**.

Every year the Bluett Award recognises two councils that have achieved the greatest relative progress in the state – one from metropolitan and regional centres and one from the shires (rural and remote). It has been in operation since 1945 and is recognised as the greatest accolade a council can achieve.

Of course **delivery of The Concourse ahead of schedule and on budget** was our achievement's centrepiece. Bluett Trust chairman John Flannery said: "Willoughby Council displayed outstanding initiative, mature forward thinking and sound management in delivering a significant community asset to the city, while maintaining a strong focus on asset management, responsible community leadership and improving youth and community services across the city."

The Local Government and Shires Association is the umbrella group representing the sector in NSW and I have been honoured to be elected once again to its executive committee.

Election year is a great opportunity to observe the political tribes, Labor, Liberal and more recently, the emerging Greens, independent and, interestingly, culturally diverse sub groups within and distinct from "the majors".

This latter trend to diversification makes me particularly proud to be part of local government in that it is genuinely striving for – and achieving – representation of our community, quite unlike the other levels of government. Local Aboriginal land councils are, for example, strongly represented among delegates to the conference and now on our executive.

As to the achievement of the associations, the diversity can make negotiation of policy positions problematic,

particularly when negotiating with the state government.

Sometimes it has been easy for the state government to take advantage of our differences – for example in development policies. Urban, fringe, rural and regional councils have very different needs and priorities.

On the other hand, there was heartening support for the federal government's carbon tax and, in particular, consideration to its impact on individuals and populations experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

We called for greater investment in the Low Carbon Communities Fund and on the state government to invest its waste levy funds (generated by council's payment of tipping fees) into alternative waste technologies to reduce emissions and generate new and sustainable economies around this industry.

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Congratulations are in order for the wonder that is **the Concourse**. The community has had two months to sample the quality

of the various performance spaces and the vitality of indoor and outdoor areas – as well as the spaciousness, charm and utility of the new library.

A variety of initial performances has succeeded in introducing the facility to many of our community segments. Responses have been uniformly positive. The new library has been a hit from day one and students, especially, flocking to use its books, internet access and meeting spaces.

The retail spaces should all be open for Christmas trading despite the current depressed trading environment.

Bravo to Council staff, the manager, Century Venues, and others who have contributed to such a successful beginning.

I have been a strong supporter of the project since I joined Council and believe we have a facility that will lead our city into a new and exciting stage.

I expect to see some action on the **Artarmon library relocation** early in 2012. Council's project officers were fully committed to get the Concourse open so a decision was taken in late 2010 to defer work on our new facility.

Artarmon residents should have another opening to celebrate by mid-2102. And that reminds me to offer a bouquet to Suzanne and all her helpers for making our local library such a welcoming and valued facility. Its popularity and patronage continue to grow.

Circumstances have meant that Eve and I have been looking for a **property** into which to **downsize** in recent months. We have looked to buy in the City of Willoughby and have been most disappointed at the scarcity of what we regard as suitable dwellings.

In the past, Council has discussed the need for suitable housing for residents at all stages of their life. I am now acutely aware that Council needs to find ways to enable retirees and empty nesters to downsize – not just within the city but also within their own suburb and among their social peers.

Eve and I can vouch for the stress of the downsizing process. No wonder so many postpone the transition and continue to rattle around in big and maintenance-hungry homes.

On a related topic, Council continues to wait for the state government to confirm our **new Local Environmental Plan**. There have been several discussions between state and council planners but no indication of the timing for resolution of ongoing differences.

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**Home business survey:** Residents may have received a survey card about Council supporting home businesses.

The primary aim was to determine if there is a need for Council to provide further resources and

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support to existing and new businesses located in the residential areas. Some secondary aims included gaining further knowledge of home based businesses in the area. In all, 470 people responded to the survey and their replies are being considered by council officers.

Council's corporate planning and the economic development unit conducted the survey using data obtained from the Australian Business Registry (ABR).

**Proposed increase in minimum rates:** Submissions close 10 November. Regardless of the amount of rates paid, ratepayers for the most part receive the same council services.

The levying of rates is a matter of finding the balance between equity of service and ability to pay. In medium to bigger strata developments, a two or three-bedroom unit with perhaps two to four occupants pays considerably less rates than an average house with the same number of occupants yet has access to the same amount of services.

*What Council is considering:* A proposal that would redistribute our existing rate income across all ratepayers. This would mean apartment owners will pay slightly more under the new structure while house owners will attract a slight reduction.

*What does it mean to you?* A 20% increase to the minimum rate. The average increase will be around \$2.40 a week. The proposal will not result

in an overall increase in council's rate income but rather a redistribution of individual rate amounts paid by individual ratepayers.

**The Loop shuttle:** The Loop runs from 10.15am to 3.30pm, Monday to Friday, servicing a different area of Willoughby each day. On Mondays it runs Artarmon to Naremburn every 35 minutes.

Your response to the survey is important and will help Council plan its services to best meet community needs.

(Please note that this service is separate from the Artarmon Loop, which operates on the same loop around the Artarmon industrial area 5 days a week.) The survey is found at: <http://haveyoursaywilloughby.com.au/loopbus>

The discussion points are:

- What other routes would you like The Loop bus to operate?
- Would you use the shuttle bus more often if it operated more frequently or at different times or days of the week?
- What other suggestions do you have for improving The Loop service?

**Barton Road complex:** More than 60 residents in the complex have registered for the home power saving program through an energy efficiency education and engagement project managed by council.



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