



OFF CREEK STORAGE

The long awaited stage to begin filling the recently completed Off Creek Storage (OCS) has seen around 80 megalitres or 25% of capacity pumped into it to date. While this is a long way off ideal, licencing and compliance issues have added time to the progress. The complexities of legislation and rules surrounding water, especially as our raw water source fits into the Murray Darling Basin never ceases to amaze and frustrate me. Still, after many years of frustration we have a new storage so maybe the process works. Another hurdle has been supply chain issues around pumping infrastructure delivery which has delayed our first fill. Having said that, we currently have 80 megalitres more in storage than we did at the last drought and despite this project pushing its timeline it still sits within our allocated grant funded budget – so no cost to ratepayers. We will soon have an open day for anyone who wishes to see the finished product. I believe it is a very impressive outcome for all of us.

RIVERVIEW

Following up on the initial communication to our community in relation to the Riverview Aged Care Hostel and the path for Presbyterian Aged Care to divest themselves of this facility, Walcha Council has been analysing the financial position and risks of taking over their operations. Obviously, this needs to be a thorough process and we need to understand all implications of this move before we can initiate a public meeting to inform everyone of the outcome of that review. This meeting will be held as soon as practical and all views on the viability of this move will be taken into account. The long term viability of Riverview is of the utmost importance and that needs to be weighed up against the critical role it plays in our community. In the end this must be a decision of the brain, not the heart.

DERBY STREET

Another long awaited project to deliver is the rehabilitation of Derby Street, or where Thunderbolts Way approaches town to the north and south. A long time in its design phase, partly due to funding constraints, the final concept is almost at the point of being put out to public display. This project not only upgrades the road surface but entails kerb and gutter along the verges and a focus on better drainage. Practicality and beautification also forms part of this rehabilitation and while the technical design is rather constrained the "pretty bits" that are there for aesthetic reasons are open for input. This will be another project that will go out to the public to view and comment on in the near future. Keep a look out in this fine publication



for that to happen. Obviously there will be disruption during the works but the long term outcome will bring major benefits to our community and travellers.

OLD HOSPITAL

This old chestnut raises its head whenever poked. It also seems to be the major issue that most politicians and bureaucrats step around. Thankfully after raising it with the Hon Adam Marshall he has become a strong advocate for an outcome and is making representation at the political level. Along this path it must be remembered that the facility is owned by Health NSW, while currently under a land claim which is still yet to be resolved. Health have full responsibility to maintain the building and surrounds. To say the maintenance has been inadequate would be obvious and now leaves our community with a derelict building that impacts our town negatively. Frankly, it's an eyesore. Many figures are bandied around relating to the cost of rehabilitation of the site, ranging from \$2m to level the site to \$5m to redevelop the building. I don't believe that anybody should be expected to take over the site with that cost hovering over a good outcome that could benefit our community. There are a couple of opportunities moving forward that could benefit the wider community and bring a solution to this ongoing problem. Governments constantly talk about a severe lack of housing, especially social housing, so our expectation should be that any opportunities to assist to provide solutions are pursued.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

While public engagement with this massive issue around Walcha ebbs and flows, it sits in the background all the time and costs Council both time and money to work through the "process". The fact that Winterbourne Wind (WW) project currently sits separate to the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) complicates Walcha's position and while the constant line from the Department of Planning (DP) is that they understand the complexities for us, it leaves us navigating through this on two fronts.

Firstly, the Voluntary Planning Agreement with Vestas in relation to the WW project sits with BAL Lawyers that represent both Uralla and Walcha Councils. The cost of this engagement is covered by Vestas. This document basically covers the community benefits payable to the respective councils and how it will be administered. Like most agreements there is a bit of toing and froing to reach a mutually acceptable outcome, but the implementation of this agreement will generate benefits to Walcha that come from hosting any projects. The yearly figure



of \$750,000 indexed to CPI sits in the vicinity of what is becoming the expected amount and is comparable to the 1.5% of build cost that the Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors has adopted in its statement of expectations. This document will be put on public display before endorsement occurs.

The second part is negotiating with Energy Corporation (EnCo) around the benefits and challenges of the REZ. At this stage we are anticipating \$250,000 a year over 3 years to cover the Council costs to prepare for the implementation and impacts of that part of the REZ. When and if any REZ projects in our LGA gain connection there will be fees paid to the community. EnCo control the route of the contentious transmission lines and while much of this is in the formative negotiations stage it will move quickly over the coming years.

WALCHA CONNECT

7am on 8 November 2023 sees a free breakfast at the Walcha Bowling and Recreation Club to allow local businesses and agri-businesses to access and interact with service providers that can assist in many areas of business continuity. Governments recognise the importance of small businesses to the economy and this will be an opportunity to network and engage with these providers. There will also be an opportunity to discuss impacts of the upcoming Motorcycle Rally. There is no shortage of information easily available on this and it's been timed to keep interruption to your business at a minimum. Register with Council by 1 November.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGER

Anyone going past the Telstra building in Apsley Street will notice NRMA have installed two EV chargers – the first for Walcha. There has been some comment on the location of these and who will pay the electricity bill. Council only facilitated the access for these, and the NRMA chose the most suitable site as there are many requirements including safe access, power supply, room and proximity to facilities. This site ticked the most boxes and was therefore chosen by NRMA, who also currently pick up the tab for the installation and power.

Clr Eric Noakes
Mayor of Walcha