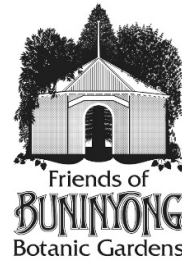


January 2020

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

A Master Plan for the Buninyong Botanic Gardens



Objective of this Information Memorandum

Ballarat City Council is planning a major engineering project to repair the leaking wall of The Gong reservoir in the Buninyong Botanic Gardens. Council is also planning to attend to instability associated with the concrete walls surrounding the walled garden, previously the township's swimming baths. Both projects are estimated to cost \$1.5+ million.

Given the confluence of these two major projects and the need for a visionary strategy to take the 159 years old Gardens into the future, Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens believes it is timely, indeed urgent, to be establishing a Master Plan for the Gardens.

Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens Inc (FBGBG) urges Council to engage with the Buninyong community and appropriate planning experts in the development of a long-term Master Plan for the Gardens. We have outlined an approach in this Information Memorandum that will ensure appropriate community participation in the planning process and, where practical, the implementation stages.

Background: 150+ years

The Buninyong Botanic Gardens (1861), one of the oldest gazetted botanical gardens in Victoria, are entered on the Victorian Heritage Register as of State significance due to their historical, aesthetic, scientific (botanical) and social standing. Hence, the character of this precinct is to be preserved whilst there is also scope for enhancement - ref: Buninyong Botanic Gardens Conservation Study (2004) and Review (2010).

The Gardens reserve spans two five-acre lots bisected by Cornish Street. The eastern area (upper Gardens) with its spring and surface fed reservoir is known as The Gong (1850). More recently (1980s), a site recognised as the original legal precinct in Buninyong at the southern perimeter of the Gardens was incorporated into the Gardens site.

Trees for the Gardens were initially supplied by Baron von Mueller of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, Geelong Botanic Gardens, and local nurseryman Francis Moss. The botanical significance relates particularly to its conifers, with the *Abies pinsapo* (Spanish fir) an outstanding example of this uncommon species. The *Acer opalus* (Italian maple) is also rare with only three other specimens known in Victoria, and the *Acer platanoides* crimson king (Norway maple) and other *Acer*s are impressive examples.

The structures within the Gardens add to its historical and social significance. The elegant latticed rotunda (1901) is Victoria's earliest memorial to Queen Victoria following her death. The court Warden's Office (1858) and Buninyong Butter Factory (1892) stand in the old legal precinct. The pavilion was relocated from near the Bowling Club in 1903 for the selling of light refreshments and hot water to picnickers. A bluestone water reservoir, now a walled garden, was constructed in 1861. Returned servicemen built its reinforced concrete walls in the early 1920s, and it was used at various times as a swimming pool until the 1950s.

The sesquicentenary of the Gardens was celebrated in 2011 with a slow-food harvest picnic that attracted some 700 locals and visitors from the wider Ballarat region.

Current: 2020

The Gardens and facilities are managed by the Ballarat City Council. The Warden's Office and Butter Factory site is tended by the Buninyong & District Historical Society (BDHS). The Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens Inc (FBGBG) is a membership-based, volunteer group that advocates for the Gardens on behalf of the community, organises gardens-related events and fund-raising for projects and facilities in the Gardens, hosts gardens education activities, tends gardens in the town centre, and coordinates outreach gardens projects with kindergarten and school children.

The Gong reservoir wall has been leaking into the Gardens for several decades, rendering a large section of the lower Gardens a quagmire and impassable during most winters. FBGBG has continually raised this issue with Council over recent years, requesting that the seepage problem be addressed. Council acknowledged the problem as a priority concern in 2017 and in 2019 accepted an engineering consultant's report that recommended remedial works. The project is anticipated to take six months and Council has run a limited communication campaign to inform the community via workshop sessions and the MySay website describing the project and requesting feedback.

The concrete walls surrounding the walled gardens have become unstable and Council has barred this area to public access for fear of the walls collapsing. Consultant reports are being received by Council as to the nature of the potential risk and options for remediation. Council has notified FBGBG that works required for these walls will be undertaken in association with The Gong project.

The character of the township of Buninyong is significantly derived from the Gardens and Gong precinct and the potential exists for this to be developed further. Any upgrade works should recognise this and could be instrumental in achieving outcomes which preserve and enhance the character and heritage of the Gardens. The current proposal for The Gong does not achieve this. Whilst mitigating risks of the reservoir wall failing, the proposal does not address ongoing risks to environment and ecology that are likely to be impacted by the changed environs due to the dam wall upgrade.

Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens are concerned that The Gong and walled gardens projects are being commissioned without appropriate community consultation or reference to the underlying landscape, heritage, social, recreational and educational values or future potential of the Gardens. We contend, therefore, it is most timely that a comprehensive master plan be prepared for the long-term future of The Gardens and, hence, that the remediation works should be reviewed as part of the master planning process.

The Proposal

We submit that appropriately qualified gardens planning consultants with relevant expertise should be commissioned in order to achieve optimum outcomes through a carefully constructed process of engagement.

Underpinning this process should be a commitment to communication in order for timely engagement with community, relevant authorities and experts, and reference to existing studies and reports.

We submit that an appropriate process of engagement would take into account the following, with an overarching principle of environmental and economic sustainability:

- Circulation
- Connection
- Amenity
- Continuity

Circulation

- Social - school children, parents and staff, weddings and events, dog walkers, walkers and runners (well-being and fitness), education including interpretive signage
- Hydrological – integrated Water Management Plan that addresses stormwater capture, treatment and use, including the potential use for irrigation; ongoing water quality monitoring and the beneficial uses and risks to the surrounding environment of which the Botanical Gardens are the major feature; surface water and groundwater should be included in a local water cycle
- Biological and Ecological - potential for constructed wetlands, littoral zone plantings, habitat for insects, birds and aquatic life
- Landscape – consideration of opportunities in both upper and lower sections for configuration of further planting, passive and recreational zones.

Connection

- To Country – the precinct has great potential to connect to the indigenous stories of the region through engagement with Wathaurong people
- Community – related to social but highlighting the potential for individual connection - school children, parents and staff, families and groups, weddings and events, dog walkers, walkers and runners facilitating well-being and fitness
- Gong and Gardens – ensuring hydrological, vegetative and visual connection between the elements of the precinct – The Gong and the Botanic Gardens.

- Buninyong District - the Buninyong Botanic Gardens precinct is a significant and integral component of Buninyong's open space and natural environment. This project offers the potential to maintain and further develop connection with other public open spaces in close proximity including De Soza Park, Union Jack Reserve, the Meeting Tree, Mt Buninyong including the crater, Wallaby Track, golf course and township centre
- Ballarat Region – the Buninyong Botanic Gardens precinct is a significant and integral component of the Ballarat region parklands and open space; maintenance and strategic development of this connection is vital
- Collections Plan – the precinct has potential to be developed in relation to the broader Collections features of the region, showcasing botanic specimens and articulating with the citywide Collections Plan.

Amenity

- Gardenesque - the Botanic Gardens and Gong precinct is a significant intact example of the gardenesque form with great potential to further develop and conserve
- Collections – this is related to the City of Ballarat collections plan and should be mutually informing
- Density – maintenance and development of tree canopy is critical in a changing climate
- Open Space – the precinct is critical in providing useable open space in a densifying and gentrifying township.

Continuity

- Corridors – provision of corridors of connection for people, animals, plants and water
- Heritage – the precinct is a valuable holder of heritage - indigenous, earliest settlement, gold era and up to the present day - which should be further developed and interpreted; due regard must be given in future planning to the “Statement of Significance” accompanying the heritage listing and the exemptions noted therein
- Neighbourhood – consideration of complementary and conflicting features of the historic and evolving surrounding precinct and streetscape (bowling green, primary school, residential, church, etc).

Where to...

Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens has enlisted a specialist reference group with qualifications and expertise relevant to public gardens, landscape planning and heritage matters... and all ardent residents of Buninyong... to collaborate with Council in the implementation of a master planning process.

Jock Gilbert: An academic and Program Manager of the Bachelor of Landscape Architectural Design in the School of Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University. His research interests lie in community engagement, regenerative practice and Indigenous-led design research, focussed around the development of green infrastructure through the convergence of concepts of place, Country and landscape.

Liam Murphy: A practising hydrogeologist working in the Victorian water industry.

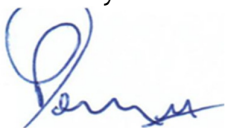
Peter Hiscock: Formerly Executive Director of Sovereign Hill and a past member of the Heritage Council of Victoria and the Board of Greening Australia; President BDHS and Committee member FBGBG.

Lorraine Powell: A gardens historian, Convener of the Friends of Ballarat Botanical Gardens History Group and former Chair of Australian Garden History Society (Vic); Vice-President, Friends of Buninyong Botanic Gardens Inc.

Roger Permezel: Strategic advisory to Tourism and Hospitality industry projects; President FBGBG.

Our proposal has been formally presented to Council and **your endorsement or further comments can be directed to Council**, notably our South ward councillors, the CEO and relevant Council officers.

Thank you...



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