



Mt Barker & District Residents' Association Inc.

PO Box 19 Mount Barker, South Australia 5251

For the Community

23 June 2022

Mr Andrew Stuart CEO
Elected Members
Mt Barker District Council
PO Box 54
Mt Barker 5251 SA

Dear Andrew and Elected Members

RE: Mt BARKER DISTRICT COUNCIL DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022

The Mt Barker & District Residents' Association (MBDRA) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to Councils' Draft Annual Business Plan (ABP) 2022. We acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by the Finance team in preparing a document that is generally more reader friendly, like last year's version. Thank you!

We note that the community feedback we have gathered from Letters to the Courier and Face Book include:

- Council should find a way to cut the budget, ie cut back on expenses
- Cut back on administrative costs, expenditure on consultants
- Cut back expenditure on the sports centre and focus on improving the poor footpaths etc
- Developers should pay more towards infrastructure
- Residents on limited/low incomes are already struggling with other cost of living pressures (fuel, electricity etc)

Our Association feedback incorporates these main themes as well as those from our members.

Cost of printing

We note that there were no hard copies of the ABP available at the Council or Library for ratepayers to take away. With the current colour printing service at the Library of \$1.00 per page, this ABP costs \$87 to print for someone without a printer. Printing in black and white would reduce this but lose the impact and importance of some of the coloured sections. We believe there should always be hard copies of any Council led public consultation document available at the counter and library or upon request for free as a service to the community. It is a dense and important document and although viewing online is possible it is not easy to read online for full comprehension. Thank you.

ABP Process

As stated last year, we still feel the ABP process could be significantly improved by taking a participatory approach to budget setting with the community. By bringing the community together much earlier in the process and asking them what they would like their rates spent on, could reduce the complaints that are heard once the rate notices are sent. There is still a disconnect between this planning work and ABP and the rate notices sent in July. We strongly advocate for participatory budgeting as a future strategy.

Necessity of a 4.7% rate increase

We believe a rate increase of 4.7% after another difficult year for ratepayers will be extremely difficult to absorb for most people, many of whom are on tight budgets. Council rates are, for many people, the single largest expense other than their mortgages or rents. We appreciate Council has many expenses and commitments, but we feel some consideration of cost-cutting, reducing unnecessary expenditure and other budgetary analysis to reduce expenses is required, rather than automatically assuming a rate increase.

Reduce expenses

We believe, as do others in the community, that Council needs to find ways to reduce costs, not just on projects, but on administration and other activities. Has Council reviewed its expenses? It only takes a reduction of approximately \$330,000 from the operational budget to ensure that rates do not have to rise by 1%. Surely this can be done without cutting the required and essential services? Can Council show some consideration of the situation this year, and reduce the proposed increase, even if only by a small percentage?

In finding ways to cut funds, we suggest some options below:

1. Council could reduce the amount given to the Adelaide Festival (is this written as 'major event' in the plan?) Why is this money simply handed over with no tender process? How are its effects and outcomes measured? What are the Key Performance Indicators? Is it the best way to spend \$70,000 on the arts, in particular as the Arts Plan is not yet finalised and released? There also does not appear to be any funding set aside for the new Arts Plan. We believe it is better to use the \$70,000 for implementation of the Council's Arts Plan and a broader range of locally based activities rather than provide \$70,000 to the Adelaide Festival.
2. Is it possible for developers to pay for more infrastructure as a condition of approval for developments? We are aware of the current developer's contribution but believe this is insufficient and needs to be increased. Where and when is this reviewed? Does the community have any input into this review? We ask you to make the developers contribute more into the community so that the ratepayers do not have to keep paying for the developer's profits.
3. Do you need to spend \$100,000 on a dog park in Nairne? Can this be done for a cheaper solution? Why is the dog park being built in Nairne and not another town? Have you

- counted the dogs in each town to justify this or is it simply based on residents in each township? Should dog parks be considered from a wider district perspective? Do the people in Meadows, Macclesfield, Echunga and other towns want or need a dog park too?
4. There is no external funding for the wastewater system and service, placing a huge impost on the ratepayers. Is this core business for Council? Could you sell the wastewater service and system to SA Water? It is creating huge long-term debt for Council which is quite concerning. We think it's time to rethink this expensive activity.
 5. Footpaths and trails, load heave and maintenance requires a great deal of money. Is there the opportunity to stage out such works to reduce the financial pressure on the Council? Do we need so many bitumen trails, can they be rubble trails if these are cheaper (mindful if rubble trails require greater upkeep)?
 6. Entry signs expenditure of \$90,000: Hahndorf and Littlehampton already have entry signs. Does Blakiston really need anything other than a town notification sign? As a hamlet, similar to other hamlets in the district, do they need expensive signage?
 7. Leadership and good governance – “New Initiatives Support To Respond to Emerging Initiatives “- \$100,000 – what is this initiative?
 8. “Implement a Sales and Marketing plan for the Summit Sport and Recreation Park to maximise use and participation.” Is this justifiable, is it to be completed in-house? How much is it costing?

These are some specific questions and concerns we hope will help staff to think differently about raising income. There are many more and earlier consultation with the community would have helped to identify other innovative options to both expense reduction and income revenue. We urge you to work constructively with the public, existing organisations, and plan now for a better future for our community, particularly with a new Council elected in November.

Introductory items

Compared to last year's ABP page 5, there are no 'Our values' listed which we think is a shame as these are important and relevant. We suggest including that page in this year's ABP.

Specific community themes need to be included above each of the pages titled 'Community Plan Themes' ie 'Community Wellbeing – Community Plan' themes. It is somewhat confusing otherwise to understand which theme the reader is viewing particularly if it is online, one page on the screen.

Also consider having the topics 'Services' on the first page of each section and have 'Annual Objectives' and 'KPIs' together on one page. See your page 42 for a good example of this. We suggest this be consistent throughout the document.

Key Objectives

We question whether all the Key Annual Objectives are achievable? There were a number that were exactly the same in the 2021/22 ABP with no explanation as to why they were not achieved in that period. Any key objective that is transferred from the previous year to this year's ABP

should be clearly identified for transparency and open governance. More specific details, and finite breakdown of expenditure, revenue and operational costs would be helpful to better understand where the funds are being expended.

Specific questions about each section can be found on the following pages.

P4:

Incorrect consultation dates/days.

P9:

- Political Landscape: tense is future but now needs to be changed to past tense.
- Climate Change: make mention of not cutting down trees, retaining tree canopy and native vegetation. (Further details about environmental matters can be found at page 8 of our submission.)

P12:

- Total Expenditure chart does not seem to match the Total Expenses listed at Appendix 1: p70. Could this be explained further please? The Appendix shows staff costs of 19million. This would seem to be approximately 32% of total project income for 2023. Is this correct?

P13:

- Corporate Implementation Plan. Are these public documents? We cannot find them on the Council's website. We think reference to all council documents/plans in the ABP should be linked to so that people do not have to search for them.

P14:

- Regional Aquatic Centre: this states that funding allows for commencement of detailed design in 22/23. However, there was 1million in last year's budget (750,000 grant) to do the detailed design. What happened to that money?

P15:

- City Centre Catalyst: most people know this as the Town Centre plan. Maybe refer to that in this section? Also, it states that there will be 'a \$100million investment' – is this from Council or developers or other? It may be worth adding a few more explanatory notes here. You might also want to remove mention of the specifics (civic building, commercial office space, etc etc) as you are still in consultation and design phase. This implies all of these items are proceeding, when in fact, due to community feedback you may have to change your plans.

P16:

- New Capital Upgrade: Suggest using consistent language and replacing 'Transport Master Plan' with the ITP. Or if it isn't replacing it, then link the two together. It's a bit confusing otherwise.
- Summary Table: Please explain the difference between the titles 'renewal' and 'new upgrade'? What buildings are having almost 2million spent on them? Here the footpath value is 2.696 million but on page 21 it is 1.11 million. This is confusing. What purpose is land being considered for 1.11 million? What recreational assets are being maintained to the value of almost 6million?

P18 and 19:

- Good to see these ratios but it is difficult to see the years font in the printout. Consider making these more legible. It's good to see the asset renewal funding ratio improve so much from the previous 2 years.
- Other considerations: it would be more contextual to add the MDPA zoning map here (move from page 64). It is particularly relevant to have this placed at the beginning of the document as it is such a contributing factor to our rate increases and council's expenditure imposts.

P21:

- Community Wellbeing: Key Annual objectives: 'Develop a one stop shop community property and facilities service suite'. Is this in the Council offices? What is it? What will it cost?
- Same section: 'Complete the Integrated Transport Plan'. Isn't that being completed by June 30 this year? Or is it to create all of the Action Plans as well? Again, greater clarity would be useful.

P22:

- Does Council need to start a playgroup? Is this core business? Can this be delivered by private enterprise? How much will this cost?

P23: Projects and Programs

- Footpath Renewal Program is listed as 400k but in the table on page 16 it is listed at 512k. Why the difference?
- Is it possible to rewrite the agreement with the St Francis School to reduce the amount they receive each year? What does the \$251,000 deliver to the community? We note this amount was equivalent in last year's document and it would be helpful to have a note against this item (and others like it where a set agreement is in place).

- Flaxley Rd & Rainbird Drive Contribution: 430k: again, this is the same as last year? Why is the Council paying for a DIT/Developer Road/intersection? What happened to last year's 451k?

P24: Projects and Programs

- Paech Road Intersection with Connector Road – design: 75k. Why doesn't Council get the developers to pay for this?
- Summit Sport & Recreation Park Link Road: 250k. Why doesn't Council get the developers to contribute to this?
- New footpath program: states here \$1,209,000 but on p16 it's \$2,184,000.
- Aquatic Leisure Centre: detailed design was 1million last year with a \$710,000 grant. This year the 'design and start of construction' is 4million with almost 3million from grants. The grants are good news, but it would help to understand how far it is expected that the 4 million will go as you only state 'start' and also what element of this is for 'design' considering last year there was 1million for design. Again greater clarity and transparency would be helpful.
- 750k for Old Mt Barker Road. Is there any evidence this is a black spot or higher priority road than other roads in the district? Or is it driver behaviour that is creating problems on this road? There are many winding and dangerous roads in our district – we question why this road has been singled out without any specific evidence supplementing this decision. Speed reduction could be introduced in the first instance.

P25: Projects and Programs

- Paech Road Upgrade – design (40k); last year 75k was budgeted for Paech Road. Did this get spent?
- Heysen Boulevard Level Crossing Design (43k) – why not get the State Govt or developers to fund these crossing changes?
- Bus Stop program: 50k. Is this enough? Last year you needed 100k. Is this a rolling expense? Does the State Govt contribute? How many bus stops are updated with this amount.
- Weed Control public land: 66k. Is this enough? External funding has been received which is good.
- Fire to Flourish program is interesting to note what 459k will be spent on but external funding has been received which is good. Same for Road Safety Recovery Project and Mural and Augmented Reality for Wallis Cinema. What is this specifically? Is it about a mural on the cinema wall?

- Documenting the indigenous history of Mt Barker Summit is a good thing. It would also be good to incorporate this into a wider story about the unique flora and fauna of the Summit. There is very little information about the Summit and it would be good for there to be a web page that provides more information about it.

P27: Ecological Sustainability

- We welcome these initiatives and in particular the new tree management program and tree data availability. This needs to be cascaded down to the CDAP and CEO approved developments to ensure they understand these principles and objectives, as well as council staff whom 'accidentally cut down trees' eg at the Summit Sport & Rec Centre.

P31: Economic Prosperity

- This section seems quite light with annual objectives. Where are the local small business support activities? What is a visitor servicing plan? Where are the events objectives? Education objectives? Perhaps this could be where the indigenous history of the Summit is added?
- The objective is to deliver 3 main street upgrades, but your KPI is to deliver just one! Last year you said you would deliver Hahndorf, Nairne and Littlehampton as well as Macclesfield. This year you are stating you will deliver Hahndorf, Nairne and Littlehampton again, but you will only deliver one of them. This seems somewhat nonsensical.
- You have a KPI to conduct 2 events to support business, but you don't have that as a key objective ie to support small business. Suggest adding this.

P32: Projects and Programs

- City Centre Catalyst: Town Square detailed designs. Costing 1.317 million – only for designs for a town square? Then funding received of 2.757million leaving a balance of 1.440million. What happens to this residual amount? The current town square does not have much to design and is far too small. Consider this design work needs to incorporate further community consultation to ensure you get it right.

P35: Key Annual Objectives

- Develop and refine a corporate customer service strategy? Do you have this in place already? How much will it cost?
- Suggest moving the Climate Change report (and the KPI on p36) to the climate section.

P41: Capital Investment: Wastewater

- This is the only section in the document that has this title 'Capital investment'. Does this mean there is no capital investment in any other areas within the ABP?

- The items here are the same as in last year's ABP. Is that due to their long-term nature? Again, a note here for recurring annual expenditure and projects would be helpful.

P43: Projects and Programs

- The 'CBD Sewer Gravity' item and description states only CBD – is this referring to Mt Barker CBD. Suggest adding 'Mt Barker' if this is what you mean.
- Four of these items, to the value of \$1.351 million (428+132+158+633), are expenditure on new growth areas. Why are we not trying harder and more persistently to get State Govt and/or developers to fund this infrastructure? It is exactly what we knew would happen in 2010, but SA Water should be paying for this, or developers, not our community. The CEO and Mayor need to take a stronger stance on this.
- Small typo in 'modem upgrade' description

P71: Statement of Financial Position

- Cash and equivalents are declining from 11,623million to 1million in 2023. This is a significant reduction. Does this allow any contingency for emergencies ie fire, flood etc? or cost blow outs of projects?
- Last year's ABP Appendix 1: Capital Projects by Asset Class is not included in this year's document. This was a useful section for the community. Please reinstate it.

ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIFIC MATTERS

From the Mayor's introduction, p5:

Another important focus of Council is the impact of climate change and caring for our environment. Throughout the year we will implement key actions from the Climate Change Action Plan.

It is not clear throughout the plan where and what these actions are in relation specifically to the Climate Change Action Plan. Given the importance of this it would be good to see the actions highlighted.

On a similar note, **P10-11 "Breakdown of \$100 of your rates"**

Which broad heading does environmental conservation and climate change mitigation strategies sit under? It is not clear.

P27-28 Community plan

Urban Greening



The district's urban areas are known for the high levels of tree canopy coverage, biodiverse watercourses, linear trails and parklands. Natural and remnant vegetation is integrated with and enhances residential and commercial development.

Nature and wildlife

The district's nature and wildlife are highly valued and thriving, appropriately protected and replenished. Urban and rural areas are designed and managed to allow harmonious co-existence between people and other species. Native vegetation areas are fully protected and extended.

Which of the key annual objectives (opposite these statements) are related to these aspirations? How will natural and remnant vegetation be protected and monitored to ensure integration into residential and commercial development? What measures will be in place to 'fully protect' native vegetation and extend it? The objectives don't seem to match the aspirations.

No projects or programs have been identified to achieve the objectives outlined across p27-28. There are only 3 projects listed and costed, all related to water quality/management.

How will all the other objectives be achieved if there is no budget allocated to them? For example,

P27 Key annual objectives

Establish a new Environmental and Natural Assets team to provide on-ground outcomes for improved biodiversity, waterways, natural areas, revegetation sites, wetlands and trees.

While this is a great objective, what will this look like (ie how many team members) and how will it be resourced?

P28: KPIs

- *A minimum of 250 street trees and 100 shade trees planted in Council's parks and reserves*
- *Plant a target of 10,000 plants in revegetation projects*

What type of trees have been identified for planting? Indigenous, drought tolerant?

The targets identified for planting seem very low. What is the reason for this?

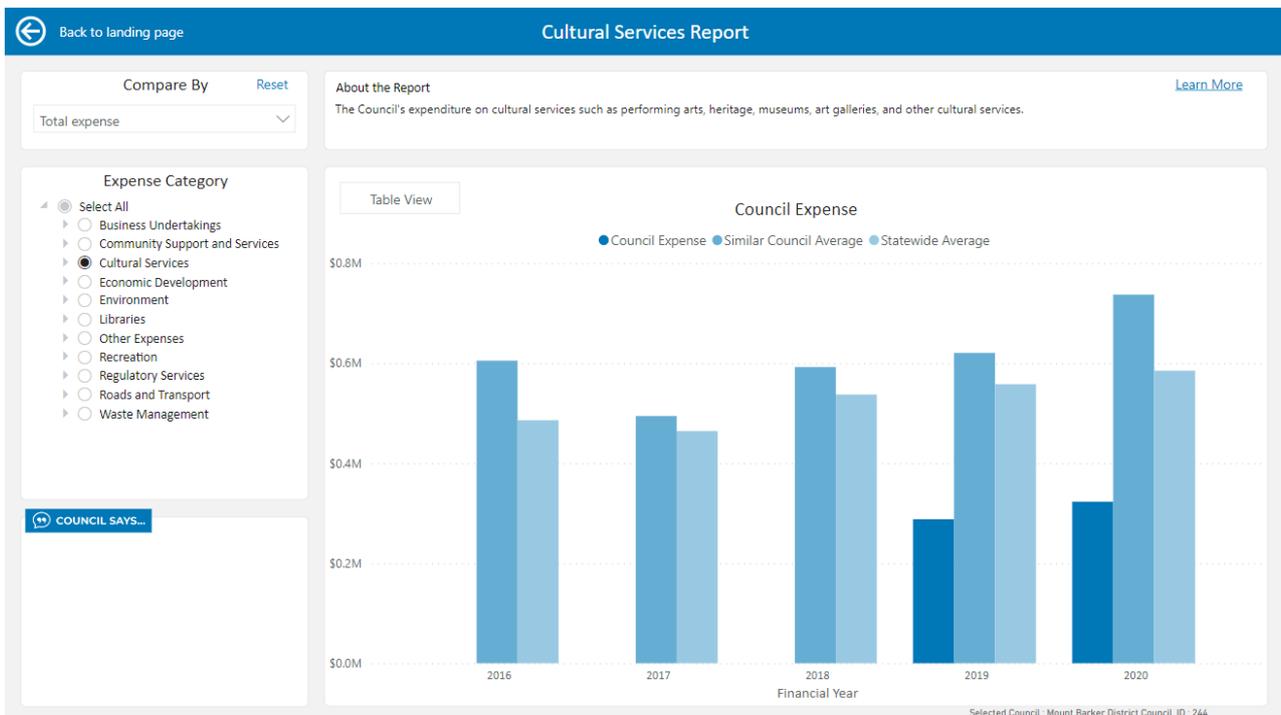
Community volunteer planting 'days' often achieve the planting of up to 1000 trees in a 2-3 hour session, depending on the number of volunteers on the day. This could be extrapolated to 1 man week per one thousand plants, though contractors would be quicker.

Therefore, given Council could also utilise its volunteers for some of these activities (at no financial cost) the number of plants and trees should be increased.

Given the significant contribution of local volunteer community and environmental groups to the district, will the Council again be offering community and environmental grants in the coming financial year? If so, how much has been budgeted for these?

CULTURAL AND ARTS EXPENDITURE

According to the SA Govt site “Councils in Focus” [Mount Barker District Council | Councils in Focus](#) Mt Barker Council does not compare favourably with other comparable councils and the state wide average in regards to Cultural Services expenditure, see below



Given Council has just announced an Arts Plan and sought feedback from the community, how is Council intending to rectify this apparent anomaly?

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide feedback. We hope that Council can provide some relief to ratepayers in this post COVID era. We welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of our response with you.

Yours sincerely

Dianne van Eck

Dianne van Eck
Chairperson

