

Meeting 1 notes – 8 June 2023

Date: 8 June 2023	Time: 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm	Venue: Maitland Town Hall
Meeting: Walka Water Works (WWW) – Community Liaison Group (CLG), Meeting 1		

Meeting objective

To commence the deliberate engagement process with the newly established Community Liaison Group (CLG) for the Walka Water Works staged reopening. To provide an informed and contextualised overview of the project, further understand community concerns and set a path for how concerns will be addressed at subsequent meetings.

IN ATTENDANCE

(CLG Total: 19)

Community Liaison Group Members

Laurie Perry

Paul Godwin

Melanie Power

Catherine O'Neil

Jim Smart

Paul Clements

Andrew McIntosh

Chris Unicomb

Jamie Richardson

Michael Brewer

Margaret Clarke

John May

Meeting Facilitators

Angela Felton (AF)

Spectrum Comms

Rebekah Prendergast

Spectrum Comms (note taker)

Maitland City Council (MCC) Project Representatives

David Evans (DE)

General Manager

Rachel MacLucas (RM)

Executive Manager Vibrant City

Reflections Holiday Park Representatives

Lauren Eyles Executive Manager – Corporate Communications

Cameron Tynan Group Manager - Operations

APOLOGIES

Monique Duncan Community member

Campbell Knox Community member

Meeting commenced 5.38pm

1. WELCOME

DE welcomed everyone to the CLG and provided an Acknowledgement of Country.

DE recognised that the project is a challenging proposal and reflected on the importance of Council engaging in the right way. He also acknowledged the importance of community engagement, and the role of this CLG. He noted that work has not begun, and Council is taking the time to engage on concerns, issues, and challenges. He welcomed Spectrum Comms as an independent facilitator and outlined the importance of having them facilitate the meeting.

2. AGENDA AND HOUSEKEEPING

AF provided a brief overview of the agenda. This covered housekeeping matters and protocols for group discussions. AF noted that notes will be taken by Rebecca from Spectrum Comms but these will not be formal minutes.

3. INTRODUCTIONS

Attendees broke into groups to introduce themselves, say what being a member of the CLG means to them, and the one thing they want to know at the end of this meeting.

Following introductions, everyone introduced their group team member to the wider group. A summary of the 'one thing' members wanted to know is noted below:

- How many meetings there will be as part of the CLG?
- Will there be a site inspection?
- Understanding infrastructure
- Keep as wildlife reserve – no destruction to nature / animals
- When does the project start?
- Wildlife preservation
- Environmental impacts



- Historical preservation
- Impact to Parkrun
- Impact / relationship with nearby retirement village
- More detail on contamination on site
- Positive influence, where things are going
- Infrastructure impacts on surrounds
- How we can implement Aboriginal history in area, connect with community
- Cultural and heritage

It was noted that if not all questions had been answered at the end of the meeting, they would be taken on notice and addressed at future meetings.

4. CLG TERMS OF REFERENCE

The CLG Terms of Reference were provided to all attendees prior to the meeting, and everyone in attendance was asked to sign a document acknowledging they had read and agreed to them.

It was noted that the CLG is not a decision making body, but a reference group for Council.

Will the CLG allow for two-way communication – will you take on board the information we bring back from our community groups?

Yes, there will be a two way flow. The CLG will be a conduit for information to flow between Council and the community and will be an exchange of information and views. Council wants to know the response of the community to communications being distributed, but the decision making body is the elected Council. This group is here to support the process of community involvement as this proposal is of significance to the community. A CLG is a good mechanism to facilitate open, honest, transparent, and factual information.

Is this group able to prepare a report of suggestions and views to supply to Council?

Council will do this and share with the group. Discussions will be recorded in notes which will be shared with you and published on the website for the community and councillors to see. This forum is for the exchange of information. There will be other community engagement for the wider community, for ideas and feedback to be taken on board.

5. MCC PRESENTATION

RM provided presentation that included background to the project and the journey so far. This presentation will be published along with the meeting notes on the Council website.

A number of questions were posed by CLG members throughout this presentation and included:

Did the DMP indicate the type of use for Walka Water Works?

Yes, it did talk about overnight accommodation with space for RV's and cabins.

Was that done via community engagement?

Yes. The DMP looked at the visitor economy for the entirety of the city, and extensive engagement was carried out over several phases. This included many months of engagement for the community to identify different areas across the LGA



and what they want to see, what's missing, and what opportunities there are to grow the visitor economy. Over 1,100 different ideas were received, and Council went through the themes before landing on five priority destination hubs. All five have a different vision based on what we heard from the community. We have also taken into consideration what we heard from other engagements, for example the Community Strategic Plan. Where we are now is the next level of engagement.

Is the DMP available online?

Yes.

Regarding the plan of management and DMP, are these for the future use of the site? Did Walka previously have a conservation order on it?

No, the building was heritage listed but there was no conservation order.

Is the report detailing asbestos contamination available?

Yes, it is published on the Council website.

Has the member for Maitland responded to that (the responsibility of the State for the remediation of the site) issue?

Yes, absolutely. It's beyond the realm of a local member (Jenny Atchinson MP) to get multi-million dollar funding for remediation – we need to be realistic. Ms Atchinson would represent on our behalf however the funding is the responsibility of the State via Crown Lands.

What is the tipping point – what work can be done before full remediation is done?

The grant will help fund some work, however the biggest funding needed for remediation is for the site of the former power station.

Is the MOU contingent on the relationship with Reflections?

The 2007 MOU that talks about remediation is between Council and Crown Lands, not Reflections. The funding remains regardless. The MOU with Crown Lands and Reflections is a different MOU, for funding under the Regional Tourism Activation Fund and seeking opportunities for further funding to achieve the vision in the DMP.

Commentary from community is around why hasn't Council already done all the studies required as part of this process?

When Council doesn't yet have the funding, it would be irresponsible to spend rate payer money for something that may not go ahead.

The Regional Tourism Activation Fund needed to include tourism funding for things like works for the pump house and accommodation. This is a statewide initiative and funding, therefore Council needed a compelling tourism activation plan to drive visitation to the city.

Will the remediation of the eastern lawn come out of the project budget?

Yes, it allows us to remediate and improve this area.

Can the money spent on the remediation of the eastern lawn be reclaimed from the state budget?

No, the primary objective is to get the site open. Council wants to bring life back into the Pumphouse building. The most recent and often used section of this building is the eastern annex (old boiler room) as a bookable space for weddings. With the eastern lawn closed, weddings have stopped. The aim is to activate the Pumphouse with a bookable ground floor space, therefore the issue of the lawn is still problematic.

In the document for the grant, the eastern annex, activation of the ground floor, and its interaction with the eastern

lawn were identified as a driver for visitation and usage. The remediation of the eastern lawn is not significant money but can be married into the project on the basis of improving the overall site.

Is the contribution from Reflections to be repaid by Council?

No, it doesn't need to be paid back. The money comes out of operating capital and is derived from other activities.

Council, Crown Lands and Reflections worked together to agree to the reduced scope ensuring that we still meet the required outcomes of the grant. The finalised deed is now in place and planning is commencing.

What is the approvals path?

There will be a series of separate development applications, and this is something Council is still mapping internally. It's too soon to say, and we will brief the group once we have a level of certainty. It is unlikely Council will be the approving authority. We are figuring out the path, including what referrals are necessary and a list of studies to be done.

Can we request a briefing from the planning team?

Yes, it's important the community understand the planning path and the opportunities there will be for formal community engagement.

Are we doing a site inspection to walk around the different areas?

We want to put contamination and remediation aside, as we have no say in the funding.

We do appreciate it would be good to have this group get context on site and we can facilitate a site visit as we move forward.

6. PRESENTATION FROM REFLECTIONS – AN INTRODUCTION

LE and CT from Reflections Holiday Parks introduced themselves and noted they will be regular participants in this group. They then delivered a presentation about Reflections Holiday Parks. A number of questions were posed by CLG members throughout this presentation and included:

Why get rid of glamping tents (due to reduced funding) and not reduce the amount of powered sites?

The glamping tents can go on the powered sites so are an option for the future. They can be interchanged and moved therefore, it is deemed more flexible to keep the powered sites.

Could a lack of connection to the sewer stop the park going in?

Part of the funding includes bringing all essential services to the site. There will be a sewer point, power etc. This is important not just for the accommodation, but for the new amenities in the Pumphouse and broader requirements for the site.

Is the current managers residence included in this site, or will it be separate?

Council advised that a manager's residence will be included in the park site.

Will the current residing manager stay?

The person is being kept in the loop and we are yet to make any determination. It is desirable to have someone there on site to ensure BBQs and garbage bins are ready for use on the weekends. 96% of the site is still Council's responsibility.

An observation was noted by a community member that the community seems misinformed, based on social media



comments regarding this project. There is concern that what is out there is not accurate.

Council responded that responses to concerns have been published to ensure the whole community has access to see what is happening out there. The Council website is the single source of truth, providing accurate information on the project.

DE explained the process of a grant application, and how community engagement is done around this.

DE also noted that there are various misinterpretations / perceptions of what a caravan park is, and this is part of the challenge. Walka will not be for permanent residents, just good quality short term holiday accommodation in a great location. Reflections prides themselves on compliance and high standards.

There are a lot of objections to the location of the glamping tents shown on the render - how would this affect access and running tracks?

The placement of glamping tents in the render was only an artist's impression and does not reflect the proposed project scope. The proposed site is the blue footprint outlined on the map – glamping would sit within this footprint, e.g. on some of the powered sites.

A community member asked for more information about enhanced public access, and this was taken on note.

Another community member also noted that he would like to compliment the current caretaker for council, who does a great job.

Who makes the final decision on the proposal?

Council is navigating what this path will be - it's likely to be an entity such as the joint regional planning panel.

What if there is objection from the community due to lack of community engagement?

We are at the beginning of the process and will be engaging with the community to inform detailed planning of the project and the planning proposal. Council, Crown Lands and Reflections have collaborated on the grant funding. Now that we have the money to go ahead, we can begin the process of planning and an important part of this is community engagement.

What is the timeframe for the project?

The next year will be used for studies, community engagement, and planning before lodging the development application.

Is there a timeframe with regards to the funding?

The grant specifies that work needs to be complete by mid-2026.

Has Reflections had a DA knocked back in past due to environmental factors?

There is no history of this occurring. Reflections goes into every project with the intent of achieving a positive outcome and does the necessary investigations upfront. A lot of parks that it manages are already formed, whereas this one is a great opportunity to start from scratch and design holiday accommodation and facilities that complement and work with the site, the local community and the environment.

Would the funding be better spent on buying up parks on Crown Lands?

It is not possible to purchase Crown Land. Reflections is a Crown Land Manager and a NSW statutory entity under the Crown Land Management Act, not a private company. Reflections manages 23,000 acres of public land on behalf of the people of NSW (only 6% of this is holiday parks, the remainder is Crown reserve), reinvesting any profit into public land.



7. PRESENTATION RECAP, FEEDBACK AND QUESTIONS

Due to timing, the group was unable to check back in on the concerns and questions raised at the start – the one thing you wanted to know. These questions will be included in the notes, and we will run through them at the start of next CLG meeting.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

DE provided some closing remarks, thanking everyone for their time and noting that Council didn't come on the presumption that every question would be answered tonight. There is lots more to discuss, and Council will bring responses back as the group continues to meet.

Council will come back to the group on the timing of the next meeting and will look to do it relatively soon bringing in the appropriate people to talk to the group.

Is it the intent to have a Councillor at these meetings?

No, this is not a formal committee of Council.

Meeting closed 7.46pm