

Meeting 2 notes – 20 July 2023

Date: 20 July 2023	Time: 5.30 pm to 7.00 pm	Venue: Maitland Council Office
Meeting: Walka Water Works (WWW) – Community Liaison Group (CLG), Meeting 2		

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: 16)

Community Liaison Group Members

Jim Smart

Paul Godwin

John May

Catherine O'Neil

Andrew McIntosh

Paul Clements

Jamie Richardson

Chris Unicomb

Margaret Clarke

Michael Brewer

Campbell Knox

Meeting Facilitators

Angela Felton (AF)

Spectrum Comms

Michael Leach

Spectrum Comms

Maitland City Council (MCC) Project Representatives

Rachel MacLucas (RM)

Executive Manager Vibrant City

Geoff Wilton (GW)

Operations Manager, Building Services

David Moloney

Group Manager Infrastructure and Works

APOLOGIES

Monique Duncan	Community member
Michele Keith	Community member
Laurie Perry	Community member
Melanie Power	Community member

Meeting commenced 5.33pm

1. CHECK IN

Since we last met:

- 1) Have you had any discussions with other members of your group or community? Is there any feedback you want to share?
- 2) What was the main thing you took away from the last meeting? Did anything surprise you?

Each person talk about their experience since the last meeting.

- Had discussions with maybe 10-15 people and found there were two 'camps' some people just want to object without a reason others had some good ideas.
- Some people didn't know where Walka was and others didn't want a caravan park.
- Mostly the people didn't want usage to change from what it is. Some people are sceptical that this is all there is with this approval for the caravan park – ie there is more to come under this proposal.
- There are two groups of thought – retirees in the village are against the change. Accept that there needs to be funding to remediate the site. Concerns that this 'thin end of the wedge' with more development to come? Rachel confirmed that only 4% of the site will be developed.

Other groups – families with kids – want to know if kids can still ride their bikes and have a picnic – but concerned that the caravan park will diminish the safety for children due to undesirable caravan park tenants.

Council confirmed that the caravan park will be high quality visitor accommodation with no permanent residents.

- Coffee carts and dog walking are desirable elements. Walka is a heritage item and if money is not spent it will fall apart and be lost. It should be seen as a great asset for Maitland and bring money in. People have no real objections, they know that Maitland is a growing area and we need places to accommodate the growing number of people.
Council advised that dogs won't be permitted at Walka.
- Very active in community with youth groups and younger families. Access is the biggest issue – who are these new people – what are they like – do we have to watch our children?' Small development is proposed now but what could it become in 10 years? Will their children have access for their children in the future? Everyone is supportive of heritage restoration work.
- Spoken to numerous people most think a caravan park is inappropriate. With the increase in population Maitland will need more bushland and a tourist attraction such as a water museum.
- Don't know that we can put peoples mind at rest until we have the DA.



2. AREAS OF TOPIC RESPONSE

Council went back through the areas of topic that members had expressed interest in at the first meeting. Most required in depth discussion so will be included as agenda items in forthcoming meetings.

There was a question in relation to the timing of the project. Council confirmed the funding agreement is until mid-2026. Further planning needs to be undertaken to determine what the timeline will look like.

3. MAITLAND CITY COUNCIL PRESENTATION

GW provided a presentation that covered the history and current status of contamination at the Walka Water Works site. 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:

When they took out the contaminated materials during demolition of the Power Station, where did it go?

We believe it was stockpiled on the site prior to removal off site however there is likely to be remnants still located on the site to this day within the contaminated areas.

Is there sufficient capacity in the filter beds to store the contaminated material?

Based on preliminary investigations the filter beds will provide enough capacity to hold the contaminated material from the contaminated areas.

The intention is that filter beds will be interpreted as part of the landscaping plan as will the power station footings.

Does the contamination extend into the water?

The reservoir floor was tested for contaminants to a water level that is known to be the lowest on record. Any remediation within the 'Walka Beach' area will go down to this point. No other contamination was found around the reservoir embankments.

How will the contaminated material be relocated on site?

Standardised processes will be undertaken for removal and handling of the contaminated material in line with Safe Work NSW and EPA requirements.

Will the site be closed during remediation?

Yes, the site will be closed for each stage. Further investigation is required, however it is possible that the site could be open on weekends provided it is assessed as safe for public use.

Will the 'Walka Beach' be subject to erosion once remediated?

Due to the local topography, the reservoir levels remain quite stagnant. During recent flood events it has overflowed and the proposed design for the 'Walka Beach' remediation will factor in any potential water movements i.e. erosion.

Was the Pumphouse used as part of the Power Station operation?

Only for administrative purposes.

Why have 'Walka Beach' remediated if we can't use the water due to blue green algae?

There may be the opportunity in the future to remediate the water body to allow for secondary contact activities such as kayaking and SUPs.

Paul remembered using the water in his youth for water sports.

Is there a more environmentally friendly process for remediation without removing the contamination from the site?

On site treatment, whereby the asbestos is destroyed and the risk reduced to an acceptable level is possible via thermal, chemical and mechanical treatments. However, specific to Walka this is not feasible as the friable asbestos cannot viably be removed from the soil to undertake one of these expensive treatments.

Can the caravan park operate during remediation of the adjacent area?

No.

Does it make sense to start the development of the caravan park before we have remediated the site?

If funding becomes available, remediation can be carried out in parallel with the construction of the caravan park. If funding doesn't become available, the site can still operate under controls (as it currently is) however any further remediation post completion of the caravan park would mean it would need to close along with the overall site during any remediation works.

Are there more funding sources, e.g. State?

Following the change of State Government, it's not yet clear what funding opportunities may become available.

It's more likely that State funding would be secured rather than Federal given Walka is a State asset.

How do we build the caravan park on a contaminated site?

The caravan park site is not contaminated in any way however the upgraded services that will extend to the caravan park site and are required for the Pumphouse upgrades and caravan park will require remediation as part of the installation works.

So the playground will not operate any time soon?

No. There is no funding at this point in time for the remediation of the Power Station Lawn that includes the playground.

Is there a chance we could have to close down the site if the caravan parks pulls out?

No. However the park will need to close during any remediation works.

4. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

CLG to keep meeting every 6-8 weeks on progress.

There was discussion about how best to keep the community informed given there is a level of misinformation circulating. A Town Hall meeting was suggested however a number of members felt this wouldn't be a productive format. Council will look at alternative ways to engage with the community about Walka.

The question was asked whether the local community should be lobbying the state government for additional funding?

Council has a good relationship with Crown Lands but they have budget constraints too. It's not, however, Council's responsibility to fund remediation.

What is the first study being done?

There will be a series of documents including a Site Master Plan, Plan of Management, Conservation Management Plan and other pre-planning assessments prepared. This will be done through a head consultant.

Meeting closed 7.14pm

