

Submission from John Harvey re: Beechworth Historic Precinct Masterplan - Phase 2

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the Beechworth Historic Precinct Masterplan - Phase 2.

The proposed plan is overly ambitious and relies far too much on technology, minimising the human element. It is also far too expensive. If it is like similar projects there will be cost overruns, and the Shire will be faced with significant costs for many years to come. Expenses that Indigo Shire can ill afford. Federal and State government grants always need to be topped up by ratepayers money, particularly for ongoing maintenance and upgrading. Council needs to concentrate on preserving, restoring and maintaining Beechworth's physical heritage. Technology, websites and digital images have their place but cannot replace "bricks and mortar". Virtual heritage is not real heritage.

Some Items of Particular Concern:

The Old Beechworth Gaol:

The Masterplan includes the Old Beechworth Gaol in the "Historic Precinct". The Gaol is indeed a significant historical site. However it is in private ownership and as such is a private business. Council must insure that no ratepayers' money is spent on it. It is up to the owners of the Gaol to maintain and promote their own business just as other private businesses in Indigo Shire are expected to do.

Ned Kelly:

The Kelly story is part of the tapestry that makes up the history of Beechworth and Indigo Shire. However it should not be overemphasized at the expense of all the other significant events in that history. It is true that the Kelly family had many encounters with the criminal justice system in Beechworth. However Ned Kelly's capture took place in Glenrowan and his trial and subsequent execution in Melbourne. The Beechworth Courthouse has many other stories to tell.

Robert O'Hara Burke:

Robert O'Hara Burke has gone down in history because of his part in the ill fated Burke and Wills Expedition of 1860-1861 which led to his death from exhaustion and starvation. Burke was a police officer in Beechworth serving as District Inspector of the Ovens District from 1854 to 1858. Beechworth was only a "stepping stone" in his career. His time here had very little to do with the famous expedition. Beechworth is not the place for a detailed display and explanation of that expedition.

The Beechworth Railway:

The railway to Beechworth was opened in September 1876 to a great deal of celebration led by prominent citizens including George B. Kerford, the 10th Premier of Victoria. The coming of the railway was one of the most important events to happen to Beechworth after the Gold Rush. It put Beechworth "on the map". It lasted just over 100 years, finally closing in January, 1977. Between 1891 and 1954 the railway extended to Yackandandah. Yet visitors to Beechworth and indeed many of the locals would not know it existed if they failed to visit the small railway museum in the rear of the Telegraph Station. The Masterplan recommends removal of this display while at the same time wanting the Telegraph Station to be devoted to the history of communication. The railway was a major part of that communication. It brought people, services, mail, and parcels to this area. It allowed goods to be economically shipped to other parts of Victoria. In the era before the motor car it was the town's connection with the outside world. When the railway came the journey to Melbourne took only a few hours instead of several days. The Beechworth Railway should be given a prominent place in this district's history.

Volunteers:

The draft Masterplan comments upon the fact that there are fewer and fewer volunteers to help out in the Historic Precinct. It is time Indigo Shire Council asked the question why. Volunteers need to be treated with more respect. Volunteers should be free to question and comment upon the Shire's activities without fear of censure. There has been a trend by the Shire to remove control of community assets (including the Historic Precinct) from the very community that owns them. Many people have simply given up voicing their opinions believing they are not being listened to. This trend needs to be reversed.

General Comment:

The great thing about the historical significance of Beechworth is that its history is real. The town centre and the Historic Precinct have survived against the odds largely as they were in the nineteenth century. These areas are not a theme park. They are real and genuine and should be retained that way.

Submitted by,

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