

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



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CEO
Shire of Southern Grampians

27 May 2017

Re. Council Plan 2017-2021 and Draft Budget 2017/18

There are several aspects of this plan that we wish to comment on.

Our main concern is that the document is virtually meaningless to a member of the public who does not have the time or ability to look up the Annual Operational Plans that the Shire hopes to deliver. Even then it is hard to understand what is really intended because so little detail is provided there.

We think, however, that some reference at least to specific items in the Draft 2017-18 budget would be a help in indicating, for example, what might be the plan indicated for Objective 4.1 (p. 21) – *'Promote and support improved biodiversity and the health of waterways, wetlands, soil and air'*.

However, having made that suggestion, we must point out how inadequate the Draft Budget 2017/18 paper is for anyone trying to understand what significance is placed on the natural environment.

In the Budget document there is no mention of the 'natural' environment in Theme 4 (p. 3). On p. 10 we find (in 4.1) that this includes the aim *'To promote & support improved biodiversity & the health of waterways, wetlands, soil & air'*. Looking further down the document (p. 12-13) we see that this might, perhaps, be part of Service Area *'Parks and urban spaces'*. While there is a specific mention of Lake Hamilton, Botanic Gardens and other places why is there no specific mention of Grange Burn, Grange Wetland, Lake Linlithgow, Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve and Nigretta Scenic Reserve? We understand that the Shire has a responsibility for these places (or at least some part of these reserves). On the face of it, there does not appear to be an intention of the Shire to promote these places as being important, or to service and maintain them. That seems odd, since they are significant for tourism and recreation. We find that most disappointing.

The impression that the natural environment has been downplayed has been added to by the failure of the Shire to mend the nature trail around the Grange Wetland (eroded in winter 2016) or to slash the parts that were not damaged; the failure to maintain the walking track between the Thomas Clark Lookout and the Wannon Falls; and the lack of maintenance of the trail around the Old Reservoir. Visitors to Hamilton are delighted to do that walk but are disappointed by its neglect.

The Shire would be aware of the State Government's recently released document *"Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037"*. One message is that *'Victoria's biodiversity is in decline'* (Minister's statement). Another is that *'Even today, decision-makers in government, business and land management too often fail to fully consider the impacts of their actions on biodiversity'* (p. 10). We think the Shire should be citing and supporting that document.

One additional comment on the Council Plan (item 2.2, p. 17) – we do not believe that the parochial Greater Hamilton brand is appropriate. That tag alienates all of the smaller towns and can be of no benefit. Why have a ridiculous 'greater' tag? We are Southern Grampians. Why is that not enough? Let Hamilton push its own barrow if it wants to grand-stand. We do not need to offend our neighbors.

Yours faithfully

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