

Huge changes afoot as Midfield Meats makes it move

Midfield Meats is on the move, with significant implications for Merrivale and beyond.

Can the Maremmas save Flagstaff Hill?

Comment: Can the Maremma's save W'bool's Flagstaff Hill?

Community vision needs to extend city wide



The imminent sale – and at least partial demolition – of the former Sandilands Hotel/Maddens Lawyers building in W'bool is expected to pave the way for new apartments in the CBD.

OPINION – JULIE EAGLES

A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. But a vision and a task are the hope of the world. – Church in Sussex England, 1730.

[quote]

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]n 2008, over several months, a great process of community consultation involving hundreds of people developed a community vision for the Warrnambool CBD called the [Warrnambool City Centre Structure Plan](#). The vision was for an '*alive, thriving, culturally rich city heart.*'

We not only developed a community vision for the CBD, but also community values, community goals, preferred development

scenarios and five future directions with strategic objectives – in other words – amazingly, we came up with a detailed framework to work towards achieving our community vision!

The people who facilitated this process were incredibly skilled and experienced. The process was fun, creative and interesting and there were lots of ways to participate.

Perhaps most amazingly – because I had never experienced it in Warrnambool before – was the ongoing and detailed feedback and updates to participants and to the whole community throughout the process.

It was, to quote **Tanya Egan**, (The Warrnambool City Council's Business Support Manager) "the most exhaustive public planning process ever undertaken by Warrnambool City Council.....in collaboration with the community."

It was developed in response to a recognition that people were often "frustrated in the past because they hadn't been asked for input from the beginning" – underpinned by the principle "that if a community is to own the plans that will shape their future, then it has to participate in developing them from the outset – not somewhere along the way."

Very big tick.



The series of W'bool laneway events, like this print workshop run by South-West TAFE Creative Arts students, show what can happen when a community works together.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap] felt very satisfied with that visioning and planning process six years ago. I am sure I'm not alone, however, in being frustrated that nothing much seemed to happen for a long time afterwards. Or was it that the communication lines seemed to falter and then stop?

After all, we've had the wonderful Lighthouse theatre re-development and then the fantastic laneways festival led by [The F Project](#) and supported by Council.

Most recently, in the past month, there's been a follow up, and by all accounts also a very good, community planning process that honed in on re-designing the streetscape for two blocks of Liebig St stretching from Koroit St to Raglan Pde.

This time I chose not to take part, but I'm glad lots of other people did. I couldn't quite understand how this process linked to what we'd done six years ago and so either the communication didn't convey this clearly enough or I missed it.

It could be that I was just not that interested in redesigning two blocks of Liebig St – we don't all have to be involved in every plan!



The campaign to Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens grew from concerns about the loss of iconic buildings and structures in Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]n 2009, just after the community visioning process for the CBD, I joined the council's **City Development Advisory Committee** where we received lots of information and requests for our input into all sorts of plans.

All of these plans were important at various levels, but I got lost in the detail and I couldn't see the guiding vision and values that held them all together: I was interested in seeing the community vision, values and goals that guided all of these plans.

And this is what I would still love to see and what I think we really need: a community vision that inspires, guides and drives all our plans for development in Warrnambool (and our town centres of Woodford, Dennington and Allansford).

A community strategic plan, a city wide structure plan... whatever 'planning speak' might label it.

Developing a city-wide community vision is about shaping our future within the context of the changing and challenging global, national, regional and local worlds in which we exist. The people who ran the CBD visioning process six years ago understood this.

One of the questions they asked was – what are the external trends and issues affecting the City Centre today that may influence the future? The facilitators believed that within any community all the skills, knowledge, passion and capacity necessary to progress already exist.

They were guided by a set of principles for “helping groups move from uncertainty to purpose.”

These include that:

- Council is part of the broader community team and not the fount of all knowledge and power.

- Council's role is to show leadership by bringing people together in an environment where everyone feels secure about sharing their hopes, aspirations and views and that, in a safe space, people will focus on common ground, not on difference.
- For things to happen, Council must work collaboratively with all the players in that complex network of organisations and individuals that make the community function every day.

I was always thinking during that process – wouldn't it be great if we were doing this not just for the CBD, but for the whole of our city!



A revamp of the northern end of Liebig St is the first major project to grow from the community driven CBD plan developed six years ago.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"]A [/dropcap] city wide visioning process would allow community debate and discussion about our strengths and what we think are the key issues and challenges facing our city now and in the future.

It would allow us to talk about our aspirations and dreams and

what we most value about our community and our natural and built environments. To talk about what give us our sense of place and belonging? What do we want to preserve, what do we want to create, what do we want to change?

Community visioning projects are now fairly commonplace across municipalities around Australia (and the world). The community visioning process for the CBD, that began 6 years ago, deserves to be replicated to a city wide plan.

In many ways, we can't afford not to do this.

As somebody said to me recently "if you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up anywhere."

[box] **Julie Eagles has been a leader of the Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group (WPHG) since 2006. '[Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher's Gardens](#)' campaign is an offshoot of WPHG and their work to highlight issues that contribute to demolition by neglect of important heritage places.**[/box]

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The sculptor who helped save the snipe



Port Fairy sculptor Don Stewart with one of his creations. Lately it has been his activism, as much as his art, that has propelled him into the headlines.

By Carol Altmann

On first appearances, **Don Stewart** looks more like the artist that he is and much less like the robust activist he has

become.

Yet the slightly-built, soft-spoken, always-smiling sculptor from Port Fairy has been a central figure in one of the longest-running planning sagas to hit the town and which has only just been resolved.

In a battle which stretches back 14 years, Don – and a small group of determined, like-minded souls – has fought to protect the habitat of a migratory bird called Latham's Snipe that arrives between August and April each year from its breeding sites in Japan to rest up at the Powling St wetlands.

The wetlands are just a short walk from Don's home and studio near Port Fairy's South Beach, where Don is usually immersed in creating his wonderful fibreglass sculptures that capture a sense of character and fun.

There has been less fun, however, around the tug-o-war that developed when a large portion of Moyne Shire council-owned land adjacent to the wetlands was sold in 1998 to a former council engineer, since retired, **John Bock**.



Worth fighting for: the Powling Street Wetlands in Port Fairy are home to one of the largest congregations of Latham's Snipe in Australia.

"Mr Bock", as Don always calls him, had hopes of converting the 3.5ha space into 43 building blocks but this would, Don explains, have spelt disaster for the snipe which relies on the protection of tall grass and the sustenance of the nutrient-rich wetlands.

Powling St is one of the few sites in Australia where the snipe still congregates in large numbers.

"In my view, nothing should be built there, because there are only about 36,000 of these birds left in the world and we have one of the largest habitats right here," Don says.

Indeed, a congregation of 18 migratory birds is considered to be of national significance and 360 birds is of international significance: the Powling St wetlands has recorded up to 430 Latham's Snipes.

Don, his wife **Sherril**, who is a retired art teacher, and their neighbour, author **Jodie Honan**, were founders of the **South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group** that was set up in 1999 in response to the Moyne Shire Council's decision to sell-off part of the site and they began to actively monitor and care for the wetlands area.

Using their first-hand knowledge, backed by expert opinion about bird habitats, the group mounted not one, but two challenges through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) against Mr Bock's proposals.



Don on a patch of the Powling Street Wetlands that has been at the middle of an intense battle about its future.

The first, in 2008, resulted in Mr Bock having to revise his plans, which he did, reducing the subdivision to 32 blocks, including one allotment that would be given back to the council and added to the wetlands. The revised plans were put to the council last year and approved.

Most people would have given up there, but Don Stewart and the South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group are not like most people. Just as it takes time and enormous patience to create a life-size figure in fibreglass, Don knew it would take patience to protect the snipe.

Don and Jodie, this time represented by [Environmental Justice Australia](#) (formerly the Environmental Defenders Office), returned to VCAT this year and argued that 32 blocks was still too many. [VCAT agreed](#) and reduced the number to 23, with a number of conditions, including that a protective fence be built around the snipe's habitat. It was a significant victory for the Landcare group.

"It is a good decision and probably the best decision we could hope for, but whether the birds actually stay around once the development goes ahead, we won't know until it is built," Don says.



Don has created fibreglass versions of Latham's Snipe: "Jodie says the legs are a bit too long."

Don suggests we wander out to see the wetlands and guides me through a wire fence and onto an invisible council "road" that cuts through the private land owned by Mr Bock. As long as we stay on the "road", he explains, we are not trespassing.

As it happens, Mr Bock – who no longer lives in Port Fairy – is down for a few days to mow his land and he spots us in the distance. I wave (what else do you do?) and he takes the opportunity to glide over on his ride-on mower to say hello.

Suddenly, I am standing between the two antagonists in what has been a long and no-doubt often heated battle, and for the first few minutes neither looks at the other as they talk. (Gulp.)

But then, Mr Bock – who I remember from his days at Belfast Shire Council – says two extraordinary things. The first: “you can’t cry over spilt milk”. The second, this time looking directly at Don: “I saw one of your snipes today”.

Don, now looking directly at Mr Bock, replies: “Really? Wow, that is late (in the season). I will have to make a note of that.”

And in that single moment – after 14 years, two VCAT hearings, endless legal argument and a lot of anxiety and stress on both sides – it felt like something of a truce.



Don at home in the studio, with dog Tuff: “It’s a good decision and probably the best decision we could hope for.”

The South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group holds regular stalls at the Port Fairy Farmers Market to raise funds to pay its legal bills from the VCAT battles. Don Stewart and Jodie Honan both contribute work for sale.

Our quiet heroes: those looking after nature



Ann and Stella from Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] One of the many beautiful things about living in South-West Victoria is the wild environment that surrounds us, from the ocean, to the rivers, the estuaries and the native bush.

While we are so fortunate to have access to such natural beauty, there is a legion of volunteers who are doing their bit to keep it that way and to reduce the environmental impact of humans.

South-West Victoria is home to several well-established and active environmental groups, including Friends of Merri Marine Sanctuary, Making a Difference for the Merri, Friends of Ralph Illidge Sanctuary and the [Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare](#)

Group.

It is the latter that we have chosen as our hero of the week after finding two of its members – Ann and Stella – hard at work digging out weeds and knee-high grass from an area known as Harris on Merri, near the Rail Trail in South Warrnambool.

We reckon that getting down on your hands and knees and weeding for several hours in order to make a public space more beautiful is worthy of reward: if only the small one that we offer. Thankyou Ann and Stella, and all those like you.

If you would like to know more about landcare groups in the area, the Basalt to Bay Landcare Network is a great place to start. Check their website [here](#).

[box] Bluestone Magazine is donating a voucher for coffee and cake to each of our quiet heroes. This week it will be Lozzar's Lounge Cafe, 52A Kepler St, Warrnambool.[/box]



Who are our other quiet heroes?

[The artist](#)

[The face behind Fifteen Minutes of Fame](#)

[Embracing diversity](#)

[The musician](#)