



# District Council of Cooper Pedy Newsletter

*Welcome to the Opal Capital of the World*

June 2020

## A message from the Administrator

Welcome to the June 2020 Council Newsletter. Although we have been in a form of hibernation for some months, you will see from reading this newsletter things have still been progressing on many fronts.

The good news is that from a health perspective the town has fared well during this period. We now need to all work together to help the town recover from this set back.

Until next time.

Tim Jackson

Administrator

tjackson@cpcouncil.sa.gov.au

0417 016 161

### **Pandemic Response**

From a health perspective, the town has weathered the pandemic well with no positive cases reported. This is a great result particularly for our older and aboriginal citizens. From an economic perspective, the town has been impacted more than other parts of the country due to its reliance on tourism.

The Council did recently consider whether it should or could waive municipal rates to assist. While this would have been desirable, the Council's current financial position did not make it possible. The Council is however prepared to defer rates and interest where financial hardship is being experienced.

### **Annual Business Plan**

Work has commenced on Council's 2020/21 Annual Business Plan (ABP) and Budget. This year the ABP will look very different to that provided in previous years as it will include a description and costing for all of Council's major programs. You will be able to see the major sources of income and major types of expenditure for each area of Council as

well as a description of the program. The new format comes from the draft CP30 document and will flow through to the new Strategic Plan, when that is updated. Council expects to prepare a draft ABP and Budget for 2020/21 in July when we will send it out for community comment.

Apart from aligning income and expenditure to different programs we are undertaking a long overdue project to update our chart of accounts. This will enable much better financial management in the future and also allow Council to streamline a number of processes.

### **Adoption of Financial Statements**

At the Council meeting held on 26 May 2020 Council adopted its 2017/18 and 2018/19 audited financial statements. It has been a long process to complete these financial statements which should have been completed 18 and 6 months earlier respectively.

Council engages an independent auditor to form an opinion of Council's financial statements and internal controls. This firm, Bentleys, was unable to form an opinion on the 2017/18 financial statements but was able to give an unqualified audit opinion on the 2018/19 figures. This is a great outcome and means that Council has a solid set of financial records. Unfortunately the auditors did not feel that Council's system of internal controls were documented and assessed to an appropriate standard and consequently issued a qualified opinion on internal controls. This does not mean that Council does not have good internal controls, but was not able to demonstrate that it assesses them regularly and documents that assessment. Council administration will work to overcome this inadequacy.

### **Water and Electricity Bills**

At the same time that this newsletter is being published, you should be receiving

your water and electricity bills. All meters were read soon after the end of May and all bills will have 3 months water or electricity consumption.

You will notice that Council has introduced a new way of receiving, and a new method for paying, rates, water and electricity bills.

All bills can now be paid using BPay. This is a widely used method of paying bills over the internet. You need to have an internet account or log on with your bank. With BPay you can enter Council's Billing code and your BPay reference number and pay your bill. It is very easy and significantly more secure than the current methods.

In future, if you want to receive your bills via email instead of in the post you can sign up to Ezybill. Details on how to get this service are included on the back of rates, water and electricity bills. When you sign up for this service you can elect to receive an SMS when a bill is sent to you so there is less risk of you not knowing you have received a bill.

To improve our internal efficiencies Council is phasing out payment by direct deposits and BPoint. If you currently use direct deposits or BPoint you should arrange to pay your account through BPay.

Of course, you can still come to the Council office to pay your account or pay by cheque or money order through the post.

### **Financial Hardship**

Council understands that people and businesses can from time to time have difficulty paying their bills on time. This year has been especially hard for some people due to the impact of Covid-19. If you are unable to pay any of your Council bills on time, be it water, electricity or





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rates, please come in to the office or give us a call so we can work out an alternative payment arrangement for you.

## Federal Government Grant

The Federal Government has allocated \$500 million to Local Government as part of its economic stimulus associated with the pandemic. The money is to be used for local road and community projects. All Councils in Australia will receive an allocation. Cooper Pedy's allocation is \$129,085 which is determined by the Grants Commission using its normal funding formula.

At this stage it is proposed to use this money for community projects not road projects. More information will be provided shortly about this.

## CEO Oversight Committee

The Committee will have its first meeting next week. The purpose of the Committee is to oversee the employment and performance of the CEO and to provide assistance with respect to the organisation's culture and senior management. There is no evidence of such a Committee existing in the past. It is rare in South Australia for a Council not to have such a Committee. The first meeting will be primarily about setting up systems and processes.

## Stuart Range Development Consent

In March 2016 Stuart Range Outback Resort lodged a development application with Council to make alterations and expand the existing facilities (including a service station) at Stuart Range. In January 2018 Council's then Chief Executive Officer granted provisional development plan consent in respect of the application. Shell Roadhouse (the plaintiffs) complained about this decision and initiated proceedings in the Supreme Court of South Australia in September 2018 seeking an extension of

time to apply for a judicial review of the development application.

The previous Council defended the former CEO's decision. On 24 February 2020 the Supreme Court upheld the appeal.

As a consequence, the plaintiff sought its costs in relation to the matter. The plaintiff, Council and Stuart Range filed submissions on costs. Following receipt of those submissions, His Honour Justice Parker issued a written judgment and ordered the Council to pay 50% of the plaintiff's costs.

What this now means is that there is no existing approval for the redevelopment of the Stuart Range resort to include a service station and that a further development application would need to be lodged, assessed and approved should Stuart Range desire to construct a service station.

Council has already spent \$169,000 in legal fees as a result of the former

Council's decision to defend the matter. The total legal bill, including 50% of the plaintiff's costs, is likely to approach \$300,000.

## Potential New Mining Area - Old Stuart Highway

In February 2020, following a question from the Miners' Association, Council resolved to write to the Minister for Energy and Mining to have the Old Stuart Highway closed to allow opal mining to occur. On 14 May 2020 Council received a response from the Minister providing in-principle support for the closure of the road subject to Council meeting the requirements of the Roads (Opening and Closing) Act 1991.

The next step is to make a formal application with the local Mines Office.

## Road Resealing

New kerbing for the first time in 5 years has commenced. Catacomb Road (see photo) has been resealed. Another 400 metres of kerbing and resealing will





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be completed on the road next week further up towards Hospital Hill Road. Well done roadworks crew!

## **William Creek Road**

Council has been maintaining William Creek Road within the Council boundary. Council has been pursuing the option for this portion of the road being maintained by the State Government in the same manner that the remainder of William Creek Road, Flat Hill Road and Kempe / Oodnadatta Roads are. The Minister of Transport has rejected the request at this stage but Council will be resubmitting further information supporting the transfer of responsibility based upon the tourist road status.

## **Paxton Road**

Council has been recording speeds on Paxton Road during school hours between April and June and the results show an average speed during those hours within the 25 km /hr zone of 31 km /hr. The criteria for triggering a decision by Council to act to control the speeds occurs when 85% of the vehicles exceed the designated speed of 25km/hr. That figure has been exceeded by many thousands of vehicle movements during the period of measurement. Council has received a report on the options which have been narrowed down to installing two speed humps at 100-meter spacing using a common technique of mounting on the existing road a rubberised squash profile hump.

Data is being collected for Cameron Avenue near the pedestrian crossing to enable an informed decision by Council on the action that could be taken for both Paxton Road and Cameron Avenue.

## **The Administrator's Quarterly Report to the Minister**

The Administrator is required to report to the Minister for Local Government on a quarterly basis. A copy of the report is

able to be viewed on the Council's website.

## **Water Pricing Equity**

You may have read recently in the media that the State Government made a number of significant announcements about water related projects. It announced that water prices in Adelaide would fall, \$40 million would be spent improving the quality of drinking water in remote communities and \$70 million would be spent on replacing the City of Tee Tree Gully's community waste water system. Nothing for Coober Pedy!

As you know consumers in Coober Pedy have paid significantly more for their water than almost all other consumers in South Australia for many years. Last year the Council raised this with the State Government. The Government commissioned SA Water to undertake a comprehensive review of future water provision in Coober Pedy. This report was handed to the Government in April. Numerous approaches have been made to the Government regarding next steps. No information has been forthcoming. Late last week the State Minister for Infrastructure agreed to a meeting with the Administrator on Monday 22 June 2020.

At this stage the Council is seeking an arrangement similar to the one it has with the State Government regarding electricity. This deal allows the Council to deliver electricity at or about Adelaide prices. Why should water be treated any differently to electricity? They are both essential services. The Council will also be seeking a State Government loan guarantee to allow the Council to replace the distribution system. We will also seek compensation for the fact that Coober Pedy consumers have paid much more for their water than other consumers in the State for many years.

Further information will be provided when available.

## **CP30**

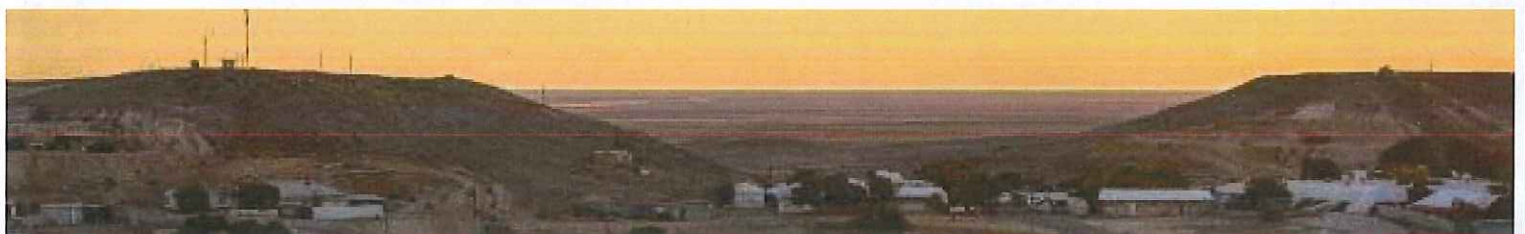
In April 2019 a Town Meeting was held at which the Administrator proposed that a community plan (known as Coober Pedy 2030 or CP30) be developed to identify ways for the town to move forward. Three areas requiring action were identified - **economic** development, the **environment** and the **social** aspects of the community. Three attendant working groups were established to identify projects which would improve these areas.

Over the following months, the working groups met on a regular basis and in November 2019 a *List of Agreed Projects* was compiled. This list forms the basis for the *Coober Pedy Town Plan 2020-2030* document. A *State of the Town* report has also been developed which lists key statistical indicators about Coober Pedy and how it compares to state and national figures. This will be used to demonstrate to State and Federal Ministers what assistance Coober Pedy needs to develop the various CP30 projects. The draft *Town Plan* and *State of the Town* report can both be viewed on Council's website at: <https://www.cooberpedy.sa.gov.au/council-meetings/council-committees/cp30-town-plan>

Over the coming months, members of the working groups will be consulting with the community (via informal chats, meetings, emails, etc) to gain their views and input to the agreed projects. This is a great opportunity to help shape the future of Coober Pedy and get involved in projects that interest you. Further information can also be obtained from: Jill Maden, Economic and Community Development Officer, Tel: 8672 4610, Email: [jmaden@cpccouncil.sa.gov.au](mailto:jmaden@cpccouncil.sa.gov.au)

## **Tourism Committee**

In February 2020 Council established a Tourism Committee. This comprises of 6 members - 3 from Council and 3 from the Coober Pedy Retail, Business and





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Tourism Association (CPRBTA).

## Visitor Information Centre

The Coober Pedy Visitor Information Centre (VIC) re-opened on Friday 5 June 2020. Two new staff have been appointed so if you have been closed and plan to re-open, or have changed your products or services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, please let us know on:

Leanne Holyoake or Dilani Ranaweera  
Visitor Information Officer  
Tel: 8762 4617  
Email: [tourism@cpccouncil.sa.gov.au](mailto:tourism@cpccouncil.sa.gov.au)

Council and the CPRBTA, through the Tourism Committee, have been working closely to ensure the service offered this year and onwards is of the quality prescribed by the South Australian Visitor Information Centre Network (SAVICN). As such, the following changes are underway:

- **VIC Upgrade:** over the next few months, the VIC will be reorganized. The posters advertising local businesses will be moved to a more prominent position, other displays will be relocated and the Historical Society displays will be grouped together.
- **Advertising:** as part of this reorganization, all current tourism operators' posters will be refreshed and a formal Advertising Policy will be introduced. The Advertising Policy and application form can be found on the Council's website at: <https://www.cooberpedy.sa.gov.au/council-information/council-documents/policies>.
- **Booking Service:** our staff will be offering a booking service to ensure that we convert as many enquiries to bookings as possible. As such, we are developing a Booking Service Policy, Procedure and Operator Booking Agreement. This policy is currently under development and operators will be consulted to discuss how it could work.

- **Product Sales:** for the start of the 2021 tourist season, a selection of souvenirs and local produce will be offered for sale in the VIC.

## Other Tourism Projects

The Tourism Committee is also in the process of developing the following:

- **Self-Drive Touring Routes:** as the Covid-19 restrictions on regional travel have now been relaxed to encourage intrastate travel, CPRBTA are pushing Coober Pedy as a visitor destination via their various social media accounts. The Tourism Committee is also looking into developing a number of self-drive touring routes to attract intrastate visitors back to the town. These will build on existing Coober Pedy branding of "Opal Capital, Get Outback, Get Underground".
- **Business Advertising Signage Policy:** a formal policy and price structure for managing the "finger" and "blade" signs advertising local businesses around town is being developed. It is anticipated this will be implemented for the 2021 tourist season.
- **Bed and Breakfast Policy:** this policy intends to set out clear guidelines for the establishment and running of bed and breakfast operations in the town. Again, this is likely to be implemented for the 2021 tourism season.

## Service Contact

### Numbers

#### Administration Office

(08) 8672 4600

#### Mini Gems Children's Centre

(08) 8672 4623

#### Library

(08) 8672 4635

#### Electricity, Water, Works Depot

(08) 86724 626

## On Call Numbers

### Aerodrome

0400 108 230

### Dog Control

0408 693 672

### Electricity

0417 814 617

### Water

0417 811 470

### Works

0417 813 571

