

## **2013 PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The 2012-2013 year has seen yet more substantial achievements for the Surrey Hills Progress Association, and it is truly pleasing to see that after more than three and a half years, the SHPA remains a vibrant, constructive and forward-looking community-based organisation.

Perhaps above all-else, the most pleasing aspect of the SHPA is the fact that it is comprised of a number of active members, and a substantially larger number of supporters, who are motivated by nothing more than a strong desire to preserve the unique characteristics of our wonderful neighbourhood, while at the same time seeking out and supporting opportunities for future growth and improvement.

It is against this background that I am pleased to present my third President's Report to the SHPA.

### **Where have we come from and what have we achieved?**

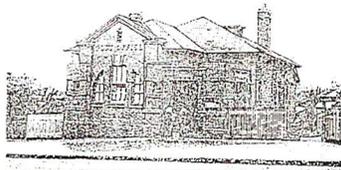
#### *Planning controls and protections*

As I noted in my 2012 President's Report, a key objective of the SHPA at the time of our inception in early 2010 was to achieve the implementation of a more sensitive and robust suite of planning controls.

At our first public meeting in May 2010, the community was jolted into action when it was realised that while substantial parts of the Whitehorse section of Surrey Hills were subject to Heritage Overlay protections under the Whitehorse Planning Scheme, protection under the Boroondara Planning Scheme for those parts of Surrey Hills within the City of Boroondara was conspicuously absent. Never was this more evident than with the demolition of the former Surrey Hills Post Office, which proved a key catalyst for the SHPA's formation.

This time last year, our objective of achieving a suite of planning controls that responds to, respects and protects the unique neighbourhood character of our beautiful suburb was only beginning to be translated into something tangible. I am pleased to note that much more progress has been made over the last 12 months, thanks in no small part to the outstanding contributions of a number of our members.

It should be with a sense of enormous pride to the SHPA that a great deal of work has been done in relation to the application of heritage overlays to substantial areas within Surrey Hills. This follows numerous submissions and representations made to our former and current Maling Ward councillors by SHPA, the heritage studies undertaken by Lovell Chen on behalf of the City of Boroondara, largely in response to those submissions and representations, and the strategic planning work that has been done by the City of



Boroondara in seeking amendments to the Boroondara Planning Scheme to implement heritage overlays over numerous parts of Surrey Hills.

It is no exaggeration to say that none of this would have been achieved without the work of the SHPA, and the unwavering support and active involvement of its members. It is difficult to overstate the significance of the achievement in bring about fundamental change to the planning framework across an entire suburb, and yet that is precisely what is currently being achieved in Surrey Hills, primarily as a result of the efforts of the SHPA.

Work has begun more recently in relation to the adoption of the new commercial and residential zones across Victoria. The City of Boroondara has taken an active approach towards this, while the City of Whitehorse has been more circumspect. While the adoption of the new residential zones, particularly the neighbourhood residential zone (which provides for a relatively high level of protection) is to be applauded and encouraged, there is a significant risk that a cavalier approach towards this task, which sees the neighbourhood residential zone applied too liberally, will ultimately prove counter-productive. I will come to this later in my report.

Of course, there is still much work to be done in ensuring that an appropriate suite of planning controls is applied across Surrey Hills. However, the work that has been done to date provides a tremendous platform to consolidate and complete this task. Members and supporters of the SHPA can be justifiably proud about what has been achieved to date.

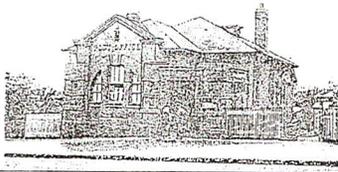
#### *Activity Centres Strategy*

As noted in my report last year, the adoption by the City of Boroondara of the Activity Centres Strategy (ACS) in 2011, followed by its interim recognition in the Boroondara Planning Scheme by the Minister for Planning in 2012, represented a significant leap forward in seeking to protect the Union Road shopping centre. The SHPA was one of the only organisations to support the ACS at the time.

While the adoption of the ACS and its subsequent implementation through the imposition of interim planning controls was met with wide support, it is still yet to be fully implemented. There remains a substantial amount of work to be done in relation to the development and adoption of appropriate and permanent zoning and overlay controls along both Union Rd, and the Canterbury Rd enterprise corridor.

It remains critical for the City of Boroondara to immediately progress with the implementation of planning controls that reflect both the significant neighbourhood character values, and the expectations and aspirations of the community. This is relevant to both the heritage studies being undertaken in our residential areas, and in our activity centres. As an organisation, we must continue working hard in seeking to bring this about.

As we have done since our formation, the SHPA has maintained positive and constructive dialogue with Council representatives. We have had numerous meetings with Cr Jane Addis



and other Council officers. We remain appreciative of the constructive dialogue that we have had, and look forward to this continuing.

*Planning appeals and panel hearings*

The SHPA has maintained an active interest and involvement in strategically significant planning matters, whether they be VCAT appeals, panel hearings, council meetings or other forums.

The organisation has again been very well represented this year by both Cliff Williams and Greg Buchanan on numerous occasions. Indeed, with the substantial number of appearances and submissions run by Cliff this year, one could be forgiven for thinking we have an accomplished planning barrister amongst our number.

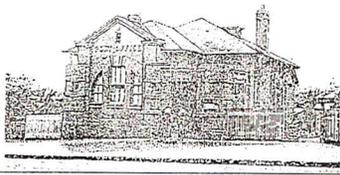
*Signage and railway station*

We are continuing to receive positive feedback in relation to the signage that the SHPA has organised around Union Road and the railway station. It is pleasing to frequently see many people pause at the signs and read them. Since our last annual general meeting, we have seen two finger posts erected; one on the corner of Bedford Avenue and Union Rd, and another at the Windsor Crescent pedestrian entrance to the railway station car park. They are a great asset to the community.

I do feel it necessary to formally record some remarks in relation to the work that the SHPA has done in relation to the Surrey Hills railway station. One of the first community-based initiatives we resolved to pursue was the rejuvenation of the railway station, which had fallen to a relatively parlous state by early 2010. The SHPA embraced the challenge of turning this situation around, and arranged for a number of working bees, grants, signage, plantings, painting and encouraging general community involvement. At one Sunday morning working bee, over 50 volunteers attended.

It is with a sense of disappointment that some of the momentum in relation to the railway station has been lost. This is not in any way due to a drop in commitment on the part of the SHPA. Rather, following personnel changes at Metro Trains Melbourne, there has been a noticeable decline in enthusiasm at MTM for the continued rejuvenation of the railway station. There has also been a disappointing lack of respect shown towards the work of the SHPA in relation to the railway station, as evidenced with the cutting of the newly-installed pickets at the Union Road crossing, and the unexplained removal of one of the Mayfair signs.

This is something that we hope will be addressed sooner rather than later, as it is important for the community to feel a sense of pride and ownership in relation to such an important piece of infrastructure. It is to be hoped that MTM can once again adopt a positive and constructive approach towards the Surrey Hills railway station, thereby encouraging a return to the previously high levels of community interest, engagement and involvement.



In referring to the railway station, it would be remiss of me as President, and of the SHPA generally, to fail to note with sadness the passing of Harry Darbyshire. Most of you will be aware that Harry assumed responsibility for the plantings on the railway station platform for over 20 years, and for much of this time was an un-sung hero. It was as a result of Harry's inspiration that the SHPA identified the railway station as a project worth pursuing. The community is poorer for Harry's passing. The SHPA will continue to work with MTM to ensure that Harry's contribution is appropriately and permanently recognised at the Surrey Hills railway station.

Finally, I was heartened to see the formation of the Surrey Hills Trader's Association at the beginning of 2013. On behalf of the SHPA, Justin Begg and I attended their inaugural meeting, and we remain informed as to their activities and areas of interest. While the SHPA has declined the opportunity to be formally represented on their committee (given the need for our organisations to remain independent), I have expressed our full support to them as an organisation on behalf of the SHPA, and have committed to assist them where we reasonably can.

### **The Future**

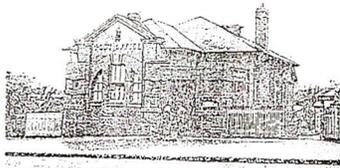
As mentioned earlier, the interim recognition by the Minister for Planning of the ACS is a positive step forward. However, it remains an interim step. The substantive planning scheme amendment, which will result in the controls becoming permanent, is yet to be implemented. We must play an active role in this process.

Similarly, the implementation of the new residential and business zones will only result in a positive outcome for our community if they are properly implemented at local level. The SHPA must lobby both the City of Boroondara and the City of Whitehorse to ensure that this occurs. In doing this, I encourage members to adopt a strategic view in relation to what will achieve the most appropriate - and effective - long term outcome. While there is an instinctive attractiveness associated with applying the neighbourhood residential zone as far and wide as practicable, there is a risk of this leading to either (or, as a worst-case, both):

- an erosion of the robustness of the controls; or
- over-intensive development being concentrated in areas that fall outside the boundaries of the neighbourhood residential zones.

Ultimately, this runs the risk of making a bad situation worse for people who fall outside the boundary of the neighbourhood residential zone.

Of course, there are a range of broader issues that remain on our agenda. These include the installation of a public toilet in Union Rd (which we need to progress with the Surrey Hills Traders' Association), and the consolidation of our web portal initiative, including its promotion in the local area. We will also continue to support the growth and development of the Surrey Hills Traders' Association, where the opportunity arises. We will also explore re-engaging with MTM in relation to our activities at the Surrey Hills railway station.



## **Acknowledgments**

Community-based organisations will only ever achieve their objectives with the active involvement of members and supporters. Once again, the SHPA has been very well served by a large number of people, and I offer my sincere thanks to everyone who has been involved.

There are some individual contributions that warrant specific mention.

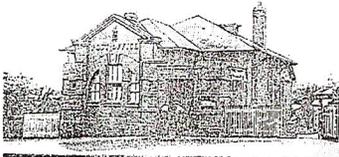
As noted above, Cliff Williams has made a substantial number of appearances and led numerous submissions on behalf of the SHPA during the last 12 months. Specifically, he has attended three VCAT hearings (totalling six days) in relation to two Union Road and one Canterbury Road developments, attended and submitted at a panel hearing in relation to planning scheme amendment C150 (dealing with the proposed heritage overlay in some residential precincts), presented to a Council meeting on amendment C108 (dealing with the implementation of the ACS for the Canterbury Road enterprise corridor), and attended four Urban Planning Special Committee meetings. Anyone familiar with the amount of preparation associated with this work will fully appreciate the effort Cliff has gone to. He has also been a great secretary throughout the year, reliably producing accurate and comprehensive minutes of our meetings and providing us with timely meeting reminders. Many thanks to Cliff for a wonderful contribution.

Justin Begg has again done a great deal of work throughout the year, both in his capacity as the financial gatekeeper, and more generally through his continued and active engagement with Council, the Surrey Hills Traders' Association and other groups, not to mention providing continued support and assistance in relation to initiatives such as the Bunnings BBQ, railway station activities and other work. Thanks again to Justin for yet another significant contribution.

Lynette Giddings continues to inspire us all with her boundless energy, enthusiasm and initiative. The Bunnings BBQ, which successfully raised over \$1,000 for the SHPA, was entirely Lynette's initiative. We also have Lynette to thank for securing our great new meeting venue, which is not only a more pleasant facility, but will result in a substantial financial saving for the organisation going forward. Many thanks to Lynette for all of your assistance.

As with Cliff, Greg Buchanan has continued to make an invaluable contribution, particularly through his advocacy and submissions at two panel hearings in relation to proposed planning scheme amendments. Greg also continues to provide the benefit of his insight and experience in relation to the various complex strategic and statutory planning issues we are confronted with, and we remain grateful for Greg's continued input.

Outside the organisation, I also acknowledge and thank the kind support of the Salvation Army for making this wonderful meeting venue available to us. This is a significant contribution, and one that we are very grateful for. I am pleased that we will be able to



## *Surrey Hills Progress Association Inc*

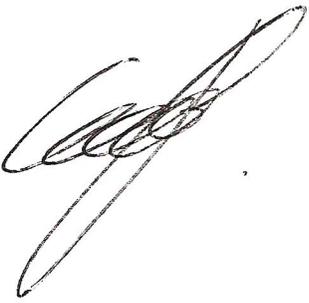
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convey, even if only in small measure, our thanks at the up-coming working bee, and I hope we have good representation there.

I would also like to congratulate Jane Addis on her election as councillor for Maling Ward, and thank her for her on-going support over the past year. We are very grateful for Jane's involvement and attendance at a number of our meetings. Jane has been a very effective representative for Maling Ward over her first year, and we look forward to continuing to work with her in the future.

Of course, there are many other people who have made valuable contributions to the organisation throughout the year, too numerous to mention. To all of the people who regularly attend our meetings and contribute, thank you.

Many thanks to the members of the SHPA for entrusting me with the position of President over the past almost four years. It is a genuine privilege to be involved in an organisation such as this, and I thank you for your support and on-going involvement.



Damien Gardiner  
President  
10 October 2013