

WINTER 2018

Singleton Edit





From the Mayor

We long proclaim the benefits of our country lifestyle as reason enough to live in Singleton, even before we talk about economic opportunities and state-of-the-art community and recreation facilities. But talks around the need for a Singleton bypass, fuelled by community concerns about safety, growing congestion and the ever-increasing divide of the New England Highway, have prompted the need for State intervention to preserve our idyllic community. Singleton has an important relationship with the NSW Government, not least as a major contributor to the State's income in the form of mining royalties. But as Singleton's economic benefits flow down the M1 to Macquarie Street, it's becoming increasingly important that we get some back. Singleton has benefited from programs such as Resources for Regions, which was established to support mining communities to provide major infrastructure. It was this program that funded the Singleton Town Centre Upgrade, and we anxiously await the outcome of the latest round of funding to see if we can continue with further stages. However, proposed changes to the operation of the program have raised questions about Council's ability to benefit into the future, adding to conversations about increased public transport, health, education and land use. And that means plenty of trips to Sydney. In recent months I've met with the Deputy Premier John Barilaro about the future of the Resources for Regions program and Transport Minister Andrew Constance about more passenger rail services. Conversations are in progress about what post-mining land will look like in Singleton, with an emphasis on who should be at the table when it comes to planning and funding. And of course, Council is working with Roads and Maritime Services to progress planning for the Singleton bypass, the Golden Highway/New England Highway overpass, and to address congestion on George Street. We are listening when you tell us what you need for our community. But more importantly, we're making sure the messages get through to the people in the State Government who need to hear them.

Cr Sue Moore | Mayor of Singleton



Planning team members Michelle Windebanks, Sarah Hyatt and Brooke Davey.



From the General Manager

It might be a daunting prospect for some organisations to ask their customers to rate their performance. But not us. I was excited when we undertook the Community Satisfaction Survey in April this year – the first time since 2016 – because I believe that as an organisation that exists to serve our community, it's vital we know what's important to you and where we can improve. There were certainly a lot of positives that came out of the results of the survey. The majority of residents who took part told us you were either somewhat satisfied, satisfied or very satisfied with Council's performance. The overall satisfaction rating came in with a mean rating of 3.28 out of 5, which is identical to the 2016 result. That's above the regional mean score of 3.22. But we don't want to coast on a static result. You told us there were a number of areas where we could improve, and we're listening. You said we could do better in the way we communicate with you; you want to know more about how Council is run; and you want to better understand our financial management. Further, the survey showed a direct correlation existed between how Council engages with you and community connectedness. This first winter edition of the Singleton Edit that you hold in your hands is a first step in addressing all of those issues. You can expect one four times a year, with the change in the seasons, as a driver for a direct conversation between you and your Council. I'm not into lip service, or engagement for engagement's sake. My commitment to you is to act on the feedback from the survey to promote an even greater connection between the work we do at Council, and the people we do it for.

Jason Linnane | General Manager

PLANNING FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

A more streamlined development application process – including electronic lodgement – is helping to make Singleton more attractive to investors with a growing number of enquiries to take advantage of the availability of land. Singleton Council has overhauled its approach to planning assessments with a greater focus on customer service and speedier outcomes for applicants, including an acknowledgement of receipt and the name of the assessment officer looking after the application.

The centrepiece of the new process is the switch to digital, with the launch of the online DA Tracker to chart the progress of applications, an interactive application form and paperless lodgement. Sarah Hyatt, Council's Development Assessment Coordinator, said the new system was designed to make Singleton an easy place to invest with growing interest in a range of potential projects across the local government area.

"The greatest number of development applications we receive are for dwelling houses, sheds and pools, but we're getting more interest in terms of people wanting to develop in Singleton," she said.

"The benefit we have in our local government area is that we've got available land to develop. We've got industrial land, viticultural land and agricultural land, plus we've got land in town. So the types of developments we're getting are very broad, and I think more people are picking up on that based on the kinds of discussions we're having."

A suite of new electronic forms, as well as guidelines, matrix, checklists and fact sheets aim to help people provide the right information before it gets to Council. Mrs Hyatt said working harder on the requirements before lodgement would lead to better quality applications coming in – and most importantly, quicker processing times. Singleton already has a quicker than average processing time with 48.5 days in April compared to the State average of 71 days.

"Getting our own house in order internally means our customers will see the flow-on effects with a more efficient service," Mrs Hyatt said. "The experience people have with Council will affect whether they choose to come and develop in Singleton, so we're working hard to make it as easy as possible to do business here."

Raising the water level

Water and sewer services across Singleton will be flush with more attention in the next 18 months as Singleton Council's water and sewer team prepares to undertake \$19million of capital works projects.



Dave Tynan | Utilities Engineer

“ This is a great step forward. This will be us delivering a better essential service to the people of Singleton. ”

Singleton Council is deepening the investment in its water and sewer network with \$19million of works ready to flow in 2018/2019.

With work on a \$1.5million UV disinfection treatment plant (which eradicates bacteria from effluent before it is discharged) already nearing completion at Council's sewer treatment plant, Interim Manager - Water and Sewer Network, Katie Hardy, said the works program was an indication of the commitment to a consistent and high quality service.

Included on the projects list are the replacement of Hardys and Jerrys Plains water reservoirs, attention for the Minimbah water reservoir servicing Whittingham and other projects such as sewer relining at Singleton Heights, worth nearly \$700,000.

The works program also includes the implementation of Council's Integrated Water Cycle Management Plan to set the direction of the team for the next eight years; the Customer Service Plan; and Engineering Specifications, which set the standard for how infrastructure will be built by both Council and developers.

Work on the list of projects will begin in the 2018/2019 financial year.

Ms Hardy said the real results would be at the end of the pipeline, even though customers may not notice it when they turn on a tap or flush the toilet.

“This is a demonstration of Council's commitment to the continued sustainability of the water and sewer service for the benefit of our customers,” she said.

“Council has a committed and dedicated water and sewer team and the direction we're heading is an opportunity to really build on that knowledge and experience.

“This is a great step forward. This will be us delivering a better essential service to the people of Singleton.”

MOSES CROSSES FLOOD DIVIDE

A well-used mineworker route regularly affected by flooding is undergoing an almost \$500,000 project to reduce the risk to safety and the time it is out of action. Lemington Road and Moses Crossing at Jerrys Plains are getting some desperate attention, with reconstruction of the road pavement from the Golden Highway to the southern approach of the bridge and a concrete pavement on the bridge approach to replace the gravel.

The project is slated for completion by 30 June 2018. Peter McMurray, Council's Manager Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, said the only downside was the need for a detour while the works were undertaken. But the long-term result would mean shorter closures. "These works will significantly reduce the safety risk associated with the gravel approaches, as well as minimise the damage that restricts access for road users," he said.

Mr McMurray said the northern approach would receive similar treatment at a later time without the need to close the bridge. "Our team is already working out how we can do the second part of the job [the northern approach] with minimal impact on motorists," he said.



Sam Walker | Project Engineer

CAPITAL WORK ON BUDGET RESULT

A total of \$31.45million has been earmarked for capital works in Singleton Council's Operational Plan for 2018/2019, even as Council continues its focus on budget improvements by driving efficiencies and cutting costs. Almost 13 per cent or \$3.51million of the capital works budget will come from the third year of a special rate variation approved by IPART for asset renewal works, in keeping with Council's commitment to the community.

The Operational Plan will be presented to Council for adoption at its meeting on 18 June 2018, outlining Council's work program from 1 July 2018 as well as Council's Revenue Policy and 2018/2019 budget.

Anthony Egan, Council's Director Corporate and Community, said Council's debt ratio and asset renewal program were important indicators of the organisation's financial health. "Our consolidated debt ratio for 2018/2019 has been estimated at 3.64%, which demonstrates the cost of servicing Council's debt obligation (principle and interest) with available revenue from ordinary activities," he said. "That is well within the State Government's Fit for

the Future benchmarks. As at 30 June 2018, Council's loan liability was \$6.84million. As indicated in the Operational Plan, we are proposing to borrow an additional \$2.17million for the replacement of the airconditioning unit in Council's Administration Building and the Civic Centre, as well as the construction of a new animal management facility (depending on a decision by Council for the provision of animal management services into the future)."

Mr Egan said both projects were included in Council's capital expenditure program, which amounted to \$31.45million for the 2018/2019 financial year. "Half of that capital expenditure is associated with asset renewal, which is the cost of renewing or major rehabilitation works on existing assets or facilities to equivalent capacity or performance capability," he said.

"Our infrastructure backlog ratio is forecast to be 1.79% in 2018/2019, which exceeds the industry benchmark of 2%, and reflects the work we have done in addressing the infrastructure backlog in recent years through measures such as the special rate variation and loan borrowings."



TAKING A STAND

General Manager Jason Linnane and OD team members Kerrie Whackett and Stefanie Nutt with Singleton Family Support representatives Lindsay Smith and Lindsay Rutherford.

Singleton Council is taking a stand against domestic and family violence with a package of initiatives to protect and support staff.

In a first for local government in the Hunter Region, Council now offers up to 10 days' paid leave for directly-affected employees for legal assistance, court hearings, relocation and counselling. Council is also working with Singleton Family Support to provide training across the organisation to help staff better respond to domestic and family violence issues in the workplace.

General Manager Jason Linnane said the package was for both women and men in a continuation of Council's commitment to promoting safety at work and at home. "Together we are taking a stand in saying domestic violence is never okay, and we are going to support our

people affected by domestic and family violence in a very practical way," he said. "Ultimately, what we want is for people to understand what domestic violence is, how to identify it and how to help stop it.

"We are really proud to be leading from the front by offering this package to our employees. But what we want most of all is that no one will ever have the need to use it."

Singleton Family Support Manager Lindsay Rutherford said it was really exciting to see local government make the issue a priority. "It's really quite ground-breaking in the sense that it's often private business that provide paid leave for their employees experiencing violence, so for us it's a huge step towards where we want to go in supporting affected people in our community and eliminating it," she said.

SINGLETON COUNCIL COMMUNITY SATISFACTION SURVEY | *What you told us*

3.28 OVERALL SATISFACTION
WITH COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE
(SCORED OUT OF 5)



of residents said they are at least "somewhat satisfied" with Council's performance



of residents said what they love most about Singleton is the safe and friendly feeling in our town and its central location



of residents said the biggest impacts for the community in the next 10 years are reducing traffic congestion and generating local employment

MOST IMPORTANT COUNCIL SERVICES OR FACILITIES

01

Informing the community of Council decisions

02

Health & hygiene of local restaurants and takeaways

03

Consulting the community

04

Management of Council's finances

05

Advocating on behalf of the community for improved services

WHAT YOU TOLD US WE COULD IMPROVE ON



- Informing the community of Council decisions
- Council responsiveness to community needs
- Consulting the community
- The way Council is managed
- Management of Council's finances

WHAT YOU SAID WE ARE DOING WELL



- Provision of library services
- Water supply
- Gym & Swim facilities
- Maintenance of sporting fields
- Recycling collection

Singleton Council honours



- 2018 StateCover WHS Excellence Awards | 2nd place
- 2018 NSW Government Excellence Awards - Risk Management Category | Finalist
- Named on the prestigious HRD Innovative HR Teams for 2018