

REPORT FROM JOINT TOURISM FORUM HELD ON 17TH MARCH 2022

Welcome by Cameron Archer president of the Dungog Tourism Board Inc. Cameron gave an acknowledgement of country He thanked Howard and Andrew from the Royal Hotel for their in-kind use of the premises for this event and for hosting.

Cameron introduced and thanked David Brouwer who had agreed to facilitate the afternoon's presentations.

Dave Layzell MP for Upper Hunter attended for a part of afternoon's presentations and also addressed the event

Daniel Le Blanc - Economic Development Dungog Shire Council

Dungog Shire's Economic Development Department works in three areas to support the development and growth of the tourism sector in the Shire: 1) Visitor Information Centre (VIC) services, 2) Tourism Product Development and 3) Tourism Assets and Infrastructure.

The VIC services in the Shire are mainly provided by volunteers, some of whom have been actively involved since the creation of the centre in the mid-1990s. It's important to recognise the role that each of these ambassadors carry out for our shire and the tourism sector on a daily basis, 7 days a week and 360 days a year including all weekends. These volunteers are: Tony and Trish Boatwright, Joyce Byron, Diane Denton, Margaret Flannery, Breck Hayward, Marion Stuart and Dawn Studdert.

In addition, Council employs a full-time Tourism Officer in the person of Wendy Farrow, who has for the last 25 years been passionate in promoting the Shire and managing the VIC Services. Wendy will be off soon on her well-deserved retirement, to be replaced with a new Tourism Development Officer position that we intend to fill in the next few months. The role will provide key services to the tourism sector including the promotion of events, regular outreach to tourism operators and the recruitment and coordination of VIC volunteers.

The second area where we intervene is in Tourism Product Development. Our Department is actively involved in planning and designing new tourism promotional tools and strategies to boost visitor numbers in our Shire. These include the reinvigoration of the VIC experience with renewed exhibitions and maps. We are also working to better develop and define the southern Barrington Tops destination along with other Dungog Shire emerging anchors such as the Dungog Common. The Newcastle international airport expansion project planned for 2023 offers our region additional new opportunities that we are looking at leveraging.

Finally, in the area of Tourism Assets and Infrastructure, we are involved in activating opportunities to increase investments in camping and holiday accommodation in our Shire. We also intend to complete this year a detailed tourism assets and infrastructure audit to plan for future view stops and rest stops along our Shire's picturesque road networks, as well as work hand in hand with Dungog Regional Tourism to improve tourism signage. Our Department will also continue to support local organisations and events organisers with their planning and grant funding applications, which is key to building a successful tourism sector in our Shire.

Angus Michie – Dungog Chronicle

Angus is new to the Chronicle and new to the Shire. This is his very first appointment since graduating from university. He is keen to meet the locals and report on the happenings. He would be happy to hear from you with any stories. You can contact Angus by email angus.michie@austcommunitymedia.com.au.

Sandra De Hoogh- Short Term Rental Accommodator

Sandra spoke of her enjoyment of being a host as a short term accommodator from renting out rooms in their home to preparing and making available a whole house as short term accommodation for visitors to the area. The since the governance of Short Term Accommodation has been transferred to NSW Government it has made it considerably easier to set up such a business and comply. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Under-review-and-new-Policy-and-Legislation/Short-term-rental-accommodation>

Sandra encouraged anyone interested in becoming a host to give it a go.

John O'Brien – Upper Hunter Arts

John is new to the job at Upper Hunter Arts but certainly no stranger to the arts. He is keen to engage with members of the community involved in any aspect of the arts. He sees Dungog Shire as particularly strong in arts/cultural with positive energy, in the area he covers from the Upper Hunter down the valley. If you would like to contact John email rado@artsupperhunter.com.au

Nathan Pratt - Consultant undertaking Dungog Shire Economic Development Plan

Nathan outlined his role as consultant for this important plan for Dungog Shire Council. As per previous email he is keen to speak with local business people in helping to compile this plan. You can contact Nathan nathan@ndped.com.au or phone 0421 328 184.

Lou Matthews - Service NSW Business

I think most people and businesses are aware of Service NSW's existence from assistance they have afforded the community particularly since the start of COVID state wide lockdowns and restrictions over the last couple of years. Lou spoke of the services, Service NSW Business offers, and how it can guide business through all NSW Government financial packages.

Also a business concierge was on hand to speak with attendees first hand during the evening, and discuss services available.

Contact for Service NSW Business louis.matthews@service.nsw.gov.au

Margaret Shannon- Rob Jeffress Group

Margaret represents company who are the preferred tenders for caravan park proposal currently before Dungog Shire Council. She gave an outline of her company describing their caravan parks already in operation. Margaret also said she came along to the forum to listen and learn about our Shire.

Sasi Victoire – Dungog Moving Forward Festival 3, 4 & 5th June 2022

Sasi is the driving force behind this festival. It is a festival combing the bike culture in Dungog area with the arts, from music to painting to sculpture. Sasi has been busy organising many events for the festival weekend with activities for all, and not forgetting the children. A weekend of activities and entertainment.

Sasi needs the support of the main street business for this event, and they are the one who will most benefit. She would like to see each business have something relating to bikes on display in front of their shops. She is also looking for sponsorship and prizes for some of the activities and would love to hear from you if you can help. svictoire@bigpond.com

Liam Banyer – National Parks

Liam lives and is stationed in Gloucester but his position covers our Southern area of the Barrington Tops National Park. He updated us on the state of our local Parks. Wet weather playing havoc with road and bridge closures. Hoping to have Sharps Creek bridge repaired by Easter as access to Gloucester Tops area. Replacing two bridges on Blue Gum loop so walking track closed during construction. These works were hoped to be completed by Easter and school holidays.

Contact for Liam Liam.Banyer@environment.nsw.gov.au>

Mike Hill – Forest Corp NSW

Mike position as Partnerships Leader has him covering an area from Central Coast to Taree, involved with camping, visitor facilities and community volunteer projects in the Forest. As with our local National Parks, Forestry are also dealing with lots of issues relating to the on going wet weather. Locally we have the Williams Tops closed due to major landslip, bridge access to Coachwood Camping area and then also the Barrington Forest Tops Road between Gloucester and Scone. Coachwood bridge is expected to be replaced by Easter.

Up date

Barrington Tops Forest Road closure update

All assessments and geo tech reports completed with engineer road plan

Approx \$2.5m project budget

Currently at tender process seeking contractor.

Once awarded and construction commences, looking at a 2-4 month construction duration (dependant on weather/snow)

Aiming for August or September.

MP Dave Layzell is in contact with our Forestry contact, so maybe good option for any updates to contact Dave's office.

Bridge to Coachwood Camp ground has now been repaired and is operational.

Michael Williams – Dungog District Chamber of Commerce

Michael is a valued committee person on DDCC. He and a few others on our committee have formed a sub committee investigating what events/festivals we currently have in the Shire, when they are held,, along with contact details for organisers. Most events have had a two year break so it is a bit of an unknown which ones will continue into the future.

The aim of the sub committee is to study this list and see where the gaps are during the year. If these gaps exist the Chamber is looking to perhaps help create some activity in those times.

Michael also encouraged all to put on their thinking caps re events and also to make a submission to the Dungog Shire Council's Open Space Strategy currently out for public comment. *Opportunity for comment on the link created is now closed but if you would still like to contribute please contact Daniel Le Blanc, Dungog Shire Council by email: DanielL@dungog.nsw.gov.au .*

Cameron Archer – Dungog Regional Tourism Board Chair

- DRT sees networking and people knowing each other as the glue to helps everyone through rough periods.
- It also drives synergies and collaboration to assist with new ideas and growth
- DRT works very closely with DDCC so as to support and not compete for members and ideas, again collaboration
- DRT is now coming to the end of its NSW Government funded Regional Growth, Environment and Tourism Fund project which has supported infrastructure on five public sites around the Shire: Dungog Common, Dungog Showground, Gresford Recreational Reserve, Williams River Holiday Park and Paterson Sportsground. Each has benefitted from infrastructure improvements however there is always need for more.
- DRT would now like to upgrade tourism signage but has yet to successfully gain funds to do that.
- It is also working closely with Council on the reinvigoration of the Visitor Information Centre.
- It has produced a Destination Management Plan to guide tourism strategy into the future.
- DRT would like to see collaboration of tourism bodies around the Barrington Tops to promote visitation
- The board members of DRT are Marion Stuart, Dungog; Jenny Akers, Dungog; Rob Auer, Clarence Town; Ivan Skaines Deputy Chair, Gresford; Cameron Archer Chair, Bolwarra. There is one vacant position.

Howard Glenn – Royal Hotel

Howard welcomed everyone along to their establishment. He described the changes made to the Royal Hotel over the last 18 months, with Meg's Kitchen taking over the front bar, the refurbishment of the accommodation upstairs, and the opening of the dining room once again. All these have been very positive moves and looks forward to moving their business forward now after all the Covid lock downs and restrictions.

Chloe Chick – Ride Dungog

Chloe introduced the whole Ride Dungog team pointing out it does take a whole team to run an organisation such as theirs, from the administration through to track maintenance.

Chloe spoke of the amazing support given by the businesses of the shire with donations toward the building of another flow track. Also vouchers provided by businesses for the Saturday morning 'drop' for riders to find along the way at the Common.

Following dinner attendees were invited to raise matters which were on their mind for future consideration. These are listed below:

- Better signage to the Common
- Centralised website for all activities and amenities around the Shire
- Much interest in tear off map and brochures from the VIC for businesses
- Interest in the reinvigoration of the VIC etc
- Everyone urged to have an input into the Destination NSW Sydney Surrounds North Destination Plan. A link will be sent out
- Suggestion of a climbing wall for children in Dungog
- Need for an overarching environmental management plan for the shire with an emphasis on weed control
- Accessible Arts for people with a disability
- Accessible amenities at caravan park
- Engage with schools about adopting an area around town and keeping it beautiful
- Discussions regarding target market for the region

The forum ended on a very positive note with a participant saying that she was pleased to see so many attending with everyone in the same room focusing on tourism