

Submission
No 66

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY
CBD

Organisation: Wingecarribee Shire Council
Name: Mr Mark Pepping
Position: Strategic Planning Manager
Telephone: 02 4868 0888
Date Received: 05/09/2008



WINGECARRIBEE
SHIRE COUNCIL

Civic Centre, Elizabeth Street, Moss Vale, 2577
P.O.Box 141, Moss Vale, 2577
Email: wscmail@wsc.nsw.gov.au
DX 4961, Bowral

Telephone: (02) 4868 0888
Facsimile: (02) 4869 1203

ABN 49 546 344 354

Our Reference: 1650
Contact: Jenny Kena

5th September 2008

Ms Catherine Watson
The Committee Manager
Public Works Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Watson

Inquiry into the development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD

Council appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to this Public Works Committee Inquiry.

The development of Arts and Cultural Infrastructure is an important issue in our regional community. Our attached submission provides a response to the terms of reference of the Inquiry as well as the additional information requested in your letter.

If you require further information, please contact Jenny Kena, Community & Cultural Development Officer on 4868 0855 or jenny.kena@wsc.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Pepping
Strategic Planning Manager



WINGECARRIBEE SHIRE COUNCIL

SUBMISSION TO THE NSW PARLIAMENT
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ARTS AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE
OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY CBD**

SEPTEMBER 2008

Summary

Council's submission provides comments and information in relation to the following areas of the Inquiry –

1. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life
 - There is no indoor public performance venue in the Shire with an audience capacity of more than 300 people and adequate stage facilities
 - There is no regional gallery or large public exhibition space suitable for travelling exhibitions or non-selling large local exhibitions
 - There is also no public secure exhibition space for artefacts or works on paper with lighting. Archival quality display cases are needed for small precious or fragile items
 - Three other significant gaps in public cultural infrastructure are space for a regional conservatorium (an outreach from Goulburn or stand-alone), studio/workshop space for local artists and an Aboriginal cultural centre, workshop and studio space
 - Access to State owned assets e.g. Bowral Court House and *Hillview* at Sutton Forest would assist with the gaps in infrastructure
 - Funding for refurbishment of existing halls, particularly Bowral Memorial Hall is currently not available within Council's budget
2. Council's staffing and funding for arts and cultural activities
 - Council achieves significant cultural development and support for "soft" infrastructure within the limited funding currently able to be allocated (75% FTE for cultural staffing plus approximately \$70,000 to support programs and organisations) however, funds are not available to develop "hard" infrastructure
3. The Desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity
 - Council has done some work towards establishing a Cultural Precinct in the centre of Bowral – this would provide opportunities to link artists together, develop an artistic centre of excellence to support organisations, artists and audiences. There are barriers to developing it further due to competition for community space, the need for funds to refurbish buildings and lack of access to the old Bowral Court House
 - At the same time, Council aims to continue to support arts and culture across its towns and villages
4. Economic and tourism impacts of arts and cultural activities
 - Access to improved infrastructure would help build on existing cultural tourism initiatives e.g. the annual Art Trail. The Shire's proximity to Sydney makes us an attractive location for visitors wanting to experience arts and culture in a different setting

- Artists are a significant home-based business sector – a sector to be encouraged due to the fit with the area and the environmental benefits (reduced transport costs and environmental footprint)

5. Accessibility of arts and cultural education

- Access to arts and culture education is limited
- It is important to maintain courses at Moss Vale TAFE including access and equity courses
- There is a need to find a venue for a conservatorium to meet the demand for music tuition in a suitable, safe location for young people and to support other music initiatives in the community
- There are issues in relation to the Aboriginal community accessing dance and music teachers due to a lack of a culturally appropriate venue

6. Council's experience with the State's grants process and issues relating to the implementation of the new arts/cultural grants program

- Council was disappointed at the discontinuation of the City of the Arts program after work had been completed on submitting an application
- Time frames for the new arts funding program do not allow enough time to allocate funds in Council budget cycle

7. Private sector funding for arts and cultural infrastructure

- Funds are not available to partner with the private sector in major capital works programs
- Rate pegging and climate change issues have resulted in less funding being available for arts and culture infrastructure

8. Cultural planning and the State Plan

- State support is needed for Council to undertake integrated cultural planning
- The State Plan has inadequate coverage of arts and culture strategies, particularly in relation to the benefits arts and culture can provide for community capacity building
- The State Plan needs to recognise the importance of State owned buildings as community assets

Council's submission provides comments and information in relation to the following areas of the Inquiry –

1. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life
2. Council's staffing and funding for arts and cultural activities
3. The Desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity
4. Economic and tourism impacts of arts and cultural activities
5. Accessibility of arts and cultural education
6. Council's experience with the State's grants process and issues relating to the implementation of the new arts/cultural grants program
7. Private sector funding for arts and cultural infrastructure
8. Cultural planning and the State Plan

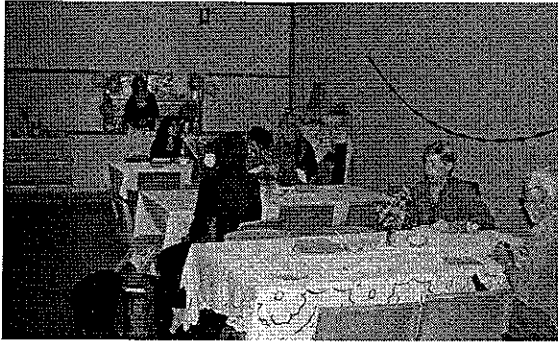
Shire overview

Wingecarribee Shire covers an area of 2700 square kilometres. This area is known to tourists as the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. The main towns are Bowral, Moss Vale, Mittagong and Bundanoon. As well there are smaller villages such as Hill Top, Yerrinbool, Colo Vale, Robertson, Berrima, New Berrima, Exeter, Burrawang, Penrose, Wingello, Sutton Forest, Avoca, Fitzroy Falls and Balmoral Village. The pattern of development is one of small towns and villages, separated by a semi rural landscape.

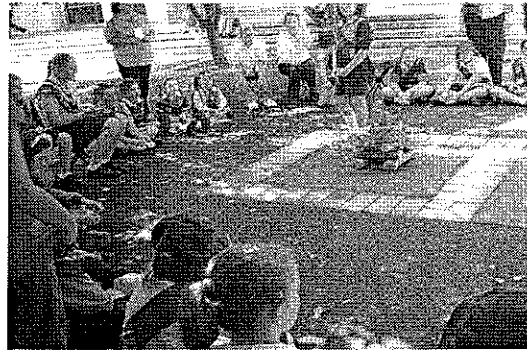
The Shire has a population of 42,272 (2006 Census) with a median age of 42 (37 for the NSW population). Of this population, the proportion of -

- Aboriginal residents is 1.3%
- children aged 0 to 14 years is 20.8% (19.8% for NSW)
- residents aged 55 years and over is 31.9% (24.8% for NSW)
- residents aged 65 years and over is 18% (13.8% for NSW)

Arts and Culture Precinct in Bowral



Bowral Memorial Hall supper room



Bendooley Place



Bowral Memorial Hall



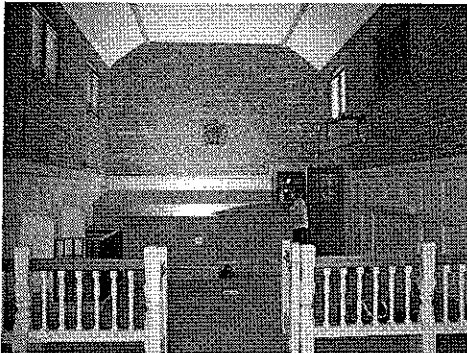
Bendooley Place entrance



Bowral Memorial Hall kitchen



Bowral Memorial Hall



Bowral Court House



Bowral Court House

1. Suitability of public infrastructure for arts and cultural life

As part of its cultural planning strategy, Council has completed an audit of cultural infrastructure in the Shire. The audit covers both public (government and community) and privately owned "hard" infrastructure including performance venues, galleries/exhibition spaces, museums, libraries/bookshops, recording/film studios as well as the "soft" infrastructure of cultural organisations/groups, art education/art classes and festivals.

The bulk of the "hard" infrastructure is halls – 27 Council owned halls, 35 community/ school/church halls and 18 private venues. The majority of these have very basic facilities for performances – some have stages, only a few have sound systems and stage lighting, seating is basic (only 1 public hall has tiered seating). The largest public hall is the Bowral Memorial Hall which seats 300 in a floor area of 286 square metres. It is a good solid building ideally located in the "Cultural Precinct" of Bowral but is very poorly equipped and in need of major updating. Other public halls regularly used for performances are Mittagong Playhouse (also in need of updating) and Bundanoon Memorial Hall (not centrally located). These hold between 150-200 people. The other halls would have a capacity of 50-200 people.

School halls at Oxley College, Frensham and Chevalier College are also used for performances but all have issues in regard to disability access, size, cost of hire, proximity to train noise, and/or unavailability due to school needs. The licensed clubs' auditoriums are another option used and one of the local wineries holds large outdoor concerts in its grounds.

There is no indoor public performance venue in the Shire with an audience capacity of more than 300 people and adequate stage facilities. As a result, it is difficult to accommodate large orchestras, large choirs, large musicals and large audiences. Therefore, to cover the cost of presenting performances either ticket prices have to be high or several performances have to be given to sell enough tickets.

According to Council's Youth Officer - Young people generally do not access the Bowral Memorial Hall mostly due to the general atmosphere of the building being unwelcoming, drab and uninviting. The décor of the hall is old and outdated, the back stage area and dressing rooms are not easily supervised to ensure safety. The main entry point contains the toilet facilities and due to the age of the facilities, emits an offensive odour.

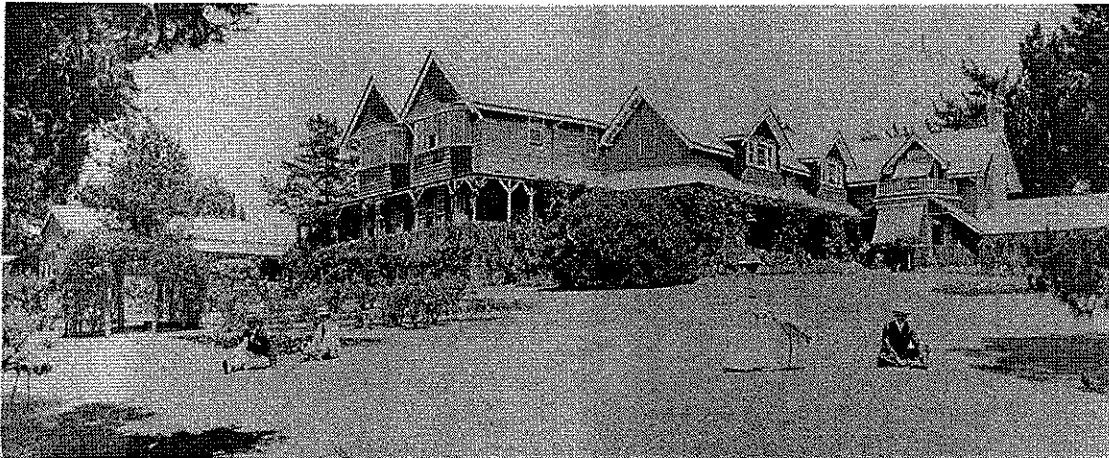
In regard to galleries and exhibition spaces, there are approximately 20 exhibition areas. Of these, 11 are private galleries, 4 are community spaces, 2 are Council spaces and 3 are spaces in cafes or wineries.

There is no regional gallery or large public exhibition space suitable for travelling exhibitions or non-selling large local exhibitions e.g. the *Local Portraits* exhibition resulting from the Robertson Miller project exhibiting at the Casula Powerhouse will probably not be able to be exhibited locally because there are no suitable venues. **There is also no public secure exhibition space for artefacts or works on paper with lighting. Archival quality display cases are needed for small precious or fragile items.** Aboriginal cultural objects of great historical significance are stored out of the area – in museums – for safe-keeping.

Three other significant gaps in public cultural infrastructure are space for a regional conservatorium (an outreach from Goulburn or stand-alone), studio/workshop space for local artists and an Aboriginal cultural centre, workshop and studio space. Another issue is the competition for space. Many (non-cultural) community services are also in need of permanent space for their offices and programs.

Examples of measures that could assist in alleviating the gaps in public cultural infrastructure in the Shire are -

- Council having access on favourable terms to vacant State owned buildings e.g. Bowral Court House (no longer in use) sits empty within the Cultural Precinct of Bowral and has only been offered to Council for purchase at market value. A long term lease of this building could assist Council house a conservatorium or gallery. These public owned buildings need to be maintained for a public purpose – they are part of the heritage and cultural landscape of the community containing community memories contributing to local identity.
- Council having access to funding to update the Bowral Memorial Hall/School of Arts building to accommodate larger performances with better facilities and to provide gallery space.
- Council having access to other State owned buildings that become vacant e.g. Hillview at Sutton Forest, former country residence of NSW Governors, could provide gallery, workshop and studio space for artists.
- Access to funding for village venues to be updated in partnership with local communities
- Further strategic planning of the cultural precinct to review the housing of all services within the vicinity with a view to finding the best fit for cultural and community facilities



Hillview at Sutton Forest

Although large venues and galleries are available at Wollongong, Goulburn, Canberra, Campbelltown and Liverpool, all of these locations are at least 1 hour by car from most areas in the Shire. This is a barrier due to cost of petrol, limited public transport, older people reluctant to drive long distances (especially at night), limited transport for people with disabilities and cost of this transport and the difficulty young people and children have accessing these locations easily. Anecdotally, more people are reporting that they no longer travel to Sydney for concerts or to visit galleries due to the cost of getting there. Most people with disabilities live well outside the CBD because of lower housing costs but are therefore unable to meet the cost of accessing cultural experiences in the CBD. This makes regional facilities very important for people with disabilities.

2. Council's staffing and funding for arts and cultural activities

Council has a position of Community & Cultural Development Officer (CCDO). This full time position is responsible for cultural policies and facilitating community cultural projects as well as administering Council's community grants program. The position is approximately 75% arts and culture related.

Council's annual funding for arts and cultural activities can be broken down as follows –

CCDO officer (75% FTE inc on costs) – \$50,000

Arts and Culture Board Working Group programs - \$20,000

Subsidies to cultural groups – approximately \$10,000

Community Assistance Scheme (grants and donations to arts and culture projects) – average \$30,000

Plus maintenance of Council owned community halls and small amounts of funding for NAIDOC Week, International Day of People with a Disability, International Women's Day, Youth Week, Heritage Festival and Seniors Week which may all include cultural components.

3. The Desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity

The Wingecarribee Shire community is rich in cultural experience and character in that a significant number of artists and artisans are located here inspired by the beauty of the environment and benefiting from lower housing costs and proximity to the Sydney market. There is also a large community of retired people involved as volunteers running community based arts organisations as well as participating as artists, and audiences for art. On any weekend during the year there is a choice of visiting a number of small exhibitions or attending at least one small performance in a village or town across the Shire.

However, the many small volunteer-run organisations, and individual artists, struggle with issues such as –

- Isolation from fellow artists due to the dispersed geography of the Shire and population hubs
- Running the business of being an artist including promotion and finding markets
- Applying for grants
- Maintaining buildings e.g. museums and community galleries
- Finding work e.g. commissions
- Accessing information about grants, prizes, competitions, residencies etc
- Governance of community organisations and associated costs e.g. insurance

Council has assisted with these issues by putting in place the following programs –

- A weekly email bulletin of events and opportunities
- Organizing arts business workshops
- Offering assistance with grant applications
- The Community Assistance Scheme – can provide funding for maintenance of buildings not owned by Council
- Supporting the development of an Artists Register
- Coordinating an Art Trail in partnership with Tourism Southern Highlands
- Subsidies for some organisations
- A commission-free public gallery space in the Civic Centre at Moss Vale

However, the Shire's arts community lacks a "one-stop shop" or hub where artists and community members can go to meet and exchange ideas, access information and advice, and advertise and promote themselves or events. There is also no place that the community can recognise as a cultural hub - activities and services are dispersed across the Shire.

Council has had a strategy of developing an area in Bowral as the "Cultural Precinct". Bowral is the most central of the three large centres in the Shire (the other two being Mittagong to the north and Moss Vale to the south).

The Cultural Precinct is located in the centre of Bowral surrounding an area called Bendooley Place. Buildings in the area include the Bowral Library, the Bowral Memorial Hall/School of Arts, the Old Town Hall (a Library managed space which currently has a meeting room and exhibition space) and the Bowral and District Art Society. The Friends of the Southern Highlands Regional Gallery have office space in the School of Arts. Other buildings in the area house Community Health, Highlands Community Centre (neighbourhood centre), YWCA and the Wingecarribee Community Foundation. The area is across the road from Corbett Gardens where the annual Tulip Time Festival is held. The empty Bowral Court House is located in this Cultural Precinct and the Bowral Public School is across the road.

With additional funding and access to the Bowral Court House on favourable terms, there is potential for this area to work well as a cultural hub.

However, any development of a central hub would need to take into account the need to maintain support of the cultural activities in the other towns and villages. Over the last 12 months, the Council Arts and Culture Board Working Group undertook "traveling round table" consultations across the Shire which demonstrated a need to continue to support local community based cultural initiatives.

4. Economic and tourism impacts of arts and cultural activities

The Council's CCDO and Tourism Southern Highlands have been working on developing an Art Trail as part of an annual *Days of Wine Arts and Roses* tourism promotion. Eighteen studios will be open for a weekend in November involving 60 local artists and artisans exhibiting and selling their work. Artists range from those who have exhibited nationally to those who have had very limited exposure to the market.

The Art Trail, along with business workshops for artists, is part of a strategy to help artists develop their businesses. The showcasing of the area as an art experience with quality, affordable, unique art, close to Sydney and Canberra has enormous potential for tourism – especially combined with the developing food and wine industry and the beautiful gardens, countryside and national parks in the area. It is early days in the development of marketing the area as an arts destination. Improved arts and culture infrastructure could assist with this strategy.

Council's Economic Development Strategy encourages home based employment as part of its Green Shire priority. Artists are a significant home based industry. There is also potential for more local artists to be involved in the development of tourism merchandise.

Elders of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists are isolated – financially and socially – and have no meeting place for cultural activities and coordination of arts events to promote their home-based arts activities to the younger Aboriginal population.

5. Accessibility of arts and cultural education

Apart from arts and cultural education within local schools, the community has the following options for accessing arts related training –

- TAFE at Moss Vale (a campus of Illawarra Institute of TAFE) has a limited range of courses available. In most cases, it is not feasible for students to travel to Goulburn and Wollongong to access a wider range of courses. Courses currently provided as access and equity classes are being reduced. TAFE Plus courses are expensive and out of the range of those on low incomes.
- Sturt Contemporary Australian Craft at Mittagong – teaching and promotion of Australian contemporary craft and design – offers short courses, weekly classes and Summer/Winter schools
- Council has organised business workshops for artists and music Masterclasses at local high schools
- Private dance and performing arts schools
- Powerpoint Music in Bowral offers music tuition rooms and an administrative structure for private music teachers.
- Private music teachers working independently
- NIDA runs some courses locally

It is important to have the arts programs at Moss Vale TAFE maintained, including access and equity classes. They provide an opportunity for students to gain qualifications to be able to work in the cultural industries and for artists to develop skills in their field of arts practice.

There are no Aboriginal specific dance or music teachers due to lack of a culturally appropriate venue.

Given the demand for music tuition in the area, there is an identifiable need for a regional conservatorium to be established in the Southern Highlands – either as an outreach from Goulburn or as a stand-alone facility. This would also provide a valuable resource to support other music initiatives in the area and open up avenues for assisting needy music students.

6. Council's experience with the State's grants process and issues relating to the implementation of the new arts/cultural grants program

Council was disappointed at the discontinuation of the City of the Arts program. Council submitted a substantial application to the 7th City of the Arts program. The application was never assessed as the program was discontinued several months after the application had been submitted.

Council has noted the announcement of the 2009 Arts Funding program on 28th August 2008 with applications closing 10th October 2008. The opportunity to apply for funding towards cultural infrastructure is appreciated. However, the 6 week time frame for completing applications limits the amount of project development work that can be done, especially for capital works projects requiring specification and costing of works. We also note the requirement that only 50% of the cost of works can be applied for. The timing of the program is too late for funds to have been allocated in Council's current budget which operates on a financial year basis, so this will further limit what can be developed for an application.

It is noted that Regional Arts grant application forms are now available in Excel format. This has made that application process much less onerous. It is disappointing that an application form in Excel format has not been made available for the new Arts Funding program.

7. Private sector funding for arts and cultural infrastructure

Council has limited opportunities for private sector funding for arts and culture infrastructure. Although some local trusts and private donors have made significant contributions to some cultural programs e.g. the Southern Highlands International Piano Competition, these contributions are not enough to sustain major cultural programs.

The maintenance of much of our infrastructure and our arts activities are currently substantially achieved through community partnerships with volunteers and not-for-profit community organisations.

Major developer funds have not been available for private sector funding of infrastructure. Council would need to contribute some capital funding to be able to partner with the private sector in major projects. Due to rate pegging and the need to prioritise essential services, these funds are not available. Cultural projects now also compete with the need to resource environmental programs relating to climate change.

8. Cultural planning and the State Plan

Council's cultural planning has been delayed due to limited staff resources. Support through Arts NSW for Council to undertake integrated cultural planning/planning for cultural infrastructure would be greatly appreciated.

An emphasis on arts and culture provides an opportunity to build community capacity in an ageing community.

It would be highly desirable to have a State cultural plan as the State Plan only provides very limited direction in relation to arts and culture strategy. Council's management plan places arts and culture in the Community and Lifestyle program where its contribution to community wellbeing, community connectedness, health and local community identity can be recognised. However, a State cultural plan in which these connections were more clearly articulated would be helpful.

The State Plan needs to consider the value of State owned assets within regional communities. Access to redundant buildings for cultural purposes allows the arts and culture economy to grow and therefore have a positive impact on economic and tourism development. They are public owned assets that local communities can add value to.