



## **2014 PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The 2013-2014 year has been another big year for the Surrey Hills Progress Association, and we should all be proud that the SHPA remains an important part of the fabric of the Surrey Hills community.

I can think of no other organisation in Surrey Hills that has as its sole purpose the betterment of the community we live in, and whose sole purpose is to strive for the advancement of our neighbourhood, without any expectation of individual reward.

What a wonderful organisation to be involved with. All of our members and supporters should be justly proud.

Our sense of pride should be magnified when we recall that the SHPA began from a standing start over four years ago. From a small meeting in the SHNC Cottage, at which we lamented the untimely loss of the former Surrey Hills Post Office and the proliferation of inappropriate and over-intensive developments, we have grown into an organisation with an incredibly impressive list of achievements and an enviable group of core supporters.

It is against this background that I present my fourth – and final – President's Report to the SHPA.

### **What have we done?**

Rather than summarise in great detail the achievements of the SHPA, I set out below a brief overview of some of the key achievements of the organisation, focusing on planning (including planning controls and development proposals), the railway station, the Union Road precinct and general community initiatives.

### ***Planning***

Our initiatives in the planning space have been multi-pronged, ranging from the strategic (particularly seeking amendments to applicable planning controls), through to the more specific, such as leading objections to development proposals of concern to the community.

A review of the planning controls that now apply to the Boroondara Council portion of Surrey Hills bears almost no resemblance to the situation when we first formed in 2010. We now enjoy the protection afforded by a comprehensive heritage overlay (which is continuing to expand), combined with controls that apply along Union Road and the Canterbury Road Enterprise Corridor. The SHPA should take particular pride in relation to the planning controls stemming from the Activity Centres Strategy, which was met with stiff resistance from many other community organisations at the time of its inception, but which was ultimately supported by the SHPA once a series of requested amendments were adopted.



It is critical that this work continue. Only when heritage overlays and design and development overlays have been applied to all those areas where they are required will we, as an organisation, be able to take some comfort that the strategic planning foundations have been laid to provide Surrey Hills with a more appropriate level of protection. This is essential in order to properly frame Council consideration of planning permit applications, and to reduce the risk of adverse VCAT determinations that can only be made by reference to the applicable suite of planning controls.

At a higher level, I note that the new residential zones have now been implemented, and that substantial portions of Surrey Hills are subject to the neighbourhood residential zone (NRZ). While greeted with some enthusiasm, I am more circumspect. Specifically, I remain firmly of the view that the broad application of the NRZ to substantial portions of Surrey Hills, and across Boroondara more generally, gives rise to a risk that the controls contained within the NRZ will ultimately be watered down, as they have the effect of quarantining large suburban areas from expansive development. While this is a laudable outcome where there are areas of genuine neighbourhood character or heritage significance, it should be resisted where it results in reasonable development proposals being stymied, particularly where such proposals are necessary to assist with meeting the needs of a growing population.

For these reasons, I encourage the SHPA to remain involved in the debate surrounding the new residential zones, and to be open to the prospect of revisiting some of the zonings that have been applied across Surrey Hills should the opportunity present itself.

At the more granular level, the SHPA has continued to fight the good fight in relation to numerous development proposals that have been imposed upon us. Perhaps the most notable was the proposed redevelopment at the former car wash site on the corner of Canterbury Road and Norfolk Road. As a result of the ultimate team effort, involving meetings with Councillors and Council officers, exhaustive reviews of plans, detailed consideration of the issues arising from the proposal (whether they be traffic, amenity, bulk and scale) and sheer hard work, the proposal was first defeated at Council, and then finally rejected by VCAT. This was an outstanding result, and much thanks must go to Cliff Williams for his tireless work and advocacy on behalf of the organisation, Justin Begg, Greg Buchanan and our local Councillor, Jane Addis. A truly remarkable result, and one of which the organisation can be justly proud.

It would be remiss to focus on the negatives though. The SHPA has also been very supportive of positive development proposals whenever the opportunity arises, consistent with our ethos of positive and proactive engagement. Over the past 12 months, this has been particularly evident in relation to the proposed development of a Coles supermarket in Union Road. As an organisation we have developed and maintained an active and positive dialogue with Coles, and I am hopeful that this will continue. While I harbour a number of concerns in relation to the proposed opening hours of the Liquorland adjoining the proposed supermarket (and I note that we have lodged an objection to those proposed



hours), the development of a supermarket in Union Road represents a terrific turning point for the shopping precinct, and it is to be hoped that the development proceeds.

As I noted in my 2013 President's Report, members and supporters of the SHPA should be proud about what has been achieved from a planning perspective, which at the end of the day is the SHPA's core reason for being.

### ***The Railway Station***

Thanks primarily to Justin Begg, the railway station has again been the beneficiary of the SHPA's efforts, with another working bee held in August. This supplements on-going work and liaison with MTM and VicTrack.

### ***Community initiatives***

As I have mentioned in previous reports, there have been many community initiatives of which we can be proud. These include the interpretive and directional signs at the railway station and along Union Road, crossing pickets, the Bedford Avenue pedestrian crossing, the SHPA web portal, working bees at the Salvation Army centre in Guildford Road and other endeavours.

Each member of the SHPA has been involved to a greater or lesser extent with each of these initiatives, and that is something that we should reflect upon with a keen sense of pride. It is indeed gratifying to see the tangible legacy of the SHPA in so many areas of the community. On behalf of the organisation, I wish to record my sincere gratitude, and indeed admiration, for each and every person who has assisted with these initiatives and willed them to reality.

### ***Where are we going?***

As this will be my final President's Report, it would be entirely inappropriate for me to seek to lay the foundations for our coming years. That is a task that will be left to my successor. However, there are some initiatives that I implore the SHPA to continue to pursue with rigour.

If local history has taught us anything, it is that we must remain vigilant to the task of monitoring and, where necessary, acting to ensure that development proposals respect our neighbourhood. This requires constant attention to be paid to the suite of applicable planning controls, and to planning permit applications and Council decisions. It is only by remaining proactive and staying on the front foot that we can meet this challenge. Cliff's monthly updates on planning permit applications are a great example of how we need to go about this.

The installation of a public toilet in Union Rd remains a personal mission. Perhaps more than any other initiative we have pursued, the public toilet has brought to the surface the profound frustration often experienced when dealing with multiple government agencies. It



is absolutely essential that this issue be closed out, and a **public** toilet be constructed. A publicly-accessible toilet in the Coles development will never be adequate, and is a lazy second-rate solution that will yield a limited public benefit at best. I encourage the SHPA to actively prosecute the case for such a basic and necessary (dare I say 19<sup>th</sup> century) facility to be provided in Union Road.

### **Acknowledgments**

As I have stated in each of my four President's reports, 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.

Cliff Williams has again been an absolute stalwart, and has assumed an increasingly demanding role in the organisation. Cliff has been a tireless advocate for and on behalf of the SHPA, and has done an outstanding job representing the interests of the organisation in a number of forums, whether they be planning panels, VCAT, Council or elsewhere. There is always a high level of preparation required to undertake these tasks, and there is always a degree of nervous energy expended before any presentation. Cliff has always handled these situations with aplomb, and we are all extremely grateful for Cliff's efforts. Added to this, Cliff has been an outstanding secretary, and has at all times been fully across the details of the administration of the organisation. Many thanks to Cliff for his great support and wonderful efforts over the last 12 months.

Justin Begg has again made a substantial contribution to the organisation, both as Treasurer, and also through his work on the railway station, his involvement with the Canterbury Road/Norfolk Road proposal and countless other activities. Many thanks to Justin for his work.

Greg Buchanan continues to provide us with the benefit of his wise counsel, particularly in relation to the detail of the planning matters we regularly deal with. I do not know of any other planner with Greg's capacity to forensically demolish a set of plans for failure to comply with the applicable planning controls, and the entire community has been the beneficiary of Greg's capabilities in this regard.

Lynette Giddings has continued to be a magnificent member and supporter, and a tireless worker for the SHPA. We are still grateful to Lynette for her instrumental role in securing our meeting venue (which has saved us in excess of \$250 over the last 12 months), and for her continued contributions to every initiative that the SHPA pursues. Thanks also to Lynette for her efforts in organising the working bee at the Salvation Army.

I again wish to formally acknowledge and thank the Salvation Army for making our meeting venue available. It is only with the mutual support of organisations such as the Salvos that other community-based organisations can prosper and thrive, and we are very grateful for the continued support of the Salvation Army.



## *Surrey Hills Progress Association Inc*

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Thanks also to Cr Jane Addis for all of her assistance. Cr Addis has proven a very effective and popular advocate for the people of Maling Ward, and we are fortunate to have such great representation.

There are many other people who have made valuable contributions to the organisation throughout the year. To those people who regularly attend our meetings and contribute, thank you.

Given this is my final President's report, I would like to specifically and separately acknowledge and thank a number of people who have been with us along the journey since the inception of the SHPA. During my time in the chair, there have been a number of individuals who have made significant contributions to the organisation. While reluctant to name names, it would be remiss of me to not reflect on the foundation meetings we held, the people who made a big contribution then and who continue to do so now. It is difficult to believe that it is now almost five years since Sue Barnett, Justin Begg, Greg Buchanan, Mark Hayward, Gerald Brown, Euan and Karen Walmsley and I, amongst others, first met to discuss the parlous state of planning in Surrey Hills. However, what could have taken flight as a protest group has instead grown into a positive, constructive and successful organisation with an enviable reputation in the City of Boroondara. It is something we all should look upon with a great sense of pride.

Finally, my sincere thanks to the members of the SHPA for entrusting me with the position of President over the past five years. It has been a genuine privilege to be so heavily involved with this organisation as a foundation member.

I thank everyone for their support, and wish the Surrey Hills Progress Association all the very best for the future.

Damien Gardiner  
President  
9 October 2014