

Supporting Community

Community groups play vital roles in providing social, health, environmental and cultural services to the people of Yass Valley. Their role needs to be recognised and better supported and promoted by Council.

Community groups in Yass Valley are facing many and difficult challenges; growing utility and operational costs; a shortage of available and affordable spaces to meet and work; an ageing volunteer workforce; increased administrative burdens and reporting requirements; and poor information and communication infrastructure.

Over the last term of Council we have seen our community groups treated poorly:

- Rates assistance was removed, adding to their financial pressures;
- The Yass & District Historical Society was given 17 days to move out of premises it had occupied for around 40 years, despite the legal requirement for 6 months' notice;
- YassFM had to return a \$50,000 State grant for a new studio after Council issued a development consent that couldn't be implemented because of mismanaged contamination issues;
- The Celtic Festival was given last-minute notice that the amenities block at Joe O'Connor Park was unavailable, despite payments and commitments having been made for their use; and
- Our community facilities are cold, unclean and don't meeting modern health, safety and disability standards because of a lack of investment in their upkeep.

And this will only get worse as Council funds are diverted into repaying the \$50m loan for a new civic centre. Our community assets will continue to deteriorate; in 2022, Council's Property Asset Management Plan identified that 20% of Council's buildings have a high level of deterioration or are at 'end of life'.

If community groups cannot provide their services, then the community misses out and the goodwill, care and expertise of the volunteers who run these groups will be lost. That approach needs to change, and needs to change now.

To make the change that's needed, your Greens Councillors will work towards:

- Ensuring the **new civic centre provides more, and more available, flexible spaces** for community groups. The new civic centre should also operate as a stand-alone haven for the community in the event of an emergency, as Council's own Climate Change and Disaster Resilience Plan recommends.
- Employing a **dedicated community engagement officer** to assist community groups with their challenges. The work community groups do is work Council doesn't have to do; assisting them with administration, accounting, sourcing grant funding and volunteer recruitment is only reasonable.



- Creating and promoting a **register of volunteers and community groups** to make it easier for those who want to lend a hand and support our community, to get involved. This will also help new residents and community members find their way into community activities and groups.
- Conducting an **annual forum of community groups** to discuss emerging challenges and identify opportunities to better support their work. The community needs to plan together as much as work together and an annual forum can help identify ways this can be achieved through the annual budget process.
- Establishing a clear and consistent **Council policy on community group assistance**. Developed with the community, such a policy would make clear how Council will: work with and respond to community groups; support and subsidise their activities; and help community groups understand what they can expect from Council – including in annual budget decision making.
- Ensuring a **regularly updated Property Asset Management Plan**, consistent with legal requirements, will drive better medium and long-term planning for maintaining community properties and better allowing community use of Council's property assets. It will ensure that all properties are better managed, rather than focussing solely on the new civic centre; and it will ensure Council makes best use of, and income from, its land assets.
- **Allocating a percentage of Council's annual budget to maintaining and repairing our failing community assets.** A dedicated percentage of Council's current operational and capital budgets should be spent on supporting community facilities and and will have Council report regularly on whether that target is being met or not.

A better supported community sector in Yass Valley isn't just the socially responsible thing to do, it will also benefit Council. A stronger community sector that can better coordinate, secure grant funding, identify and implement new opportunities and provide better services to the community will take pressure off Council's own budget. And it will give Council an avenue for genuine feedback to help it tailor its own services to the community.

Community groups shouldn't have to go 'cap in hand' to Council to initiate great community outcomes. The Greens will push Council to build a genuine partnership with our community groups – for everyone's benefit.

TOGETHER FOR REAL CHANGE.

VOTE GREEN

ADRIAN CAMERON AND TANYA CULLEN FOR THE CHANGE YASS VALLEY NEEDS

