

Foundations hold firm in a year of great change

By TONY FOSTER*

AS we approach the end of 2020, it is worth reflecting on what has been a challenging and unique year for our Council, community, state, country and indeed the world.

There's no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic heralded massive changes in our lives and impacted everything - our home life, work, recreation and community activities.

From being relatively free to do almost anything we wanted to or were able to do, we were restricted to staying at home, working at home or remotely, children studying at home and not even being able to play with friends, services curtailed, sports and entertainment cancelled. Indeed, our whole way of life experienced unprecedented changes.

Fortunately for Tasmania, the pandemic was quickly brought under control and restrictions were slowly relaxed. At the time of writing, the situation here is almost back to some sort of normality and we are even welcoming visitors from most Australian states.

But this is very much the 'new normal' because coronavirus has not disappeared and although treatments and the development of vaccines are encouraging, there are no guarantees that these will eradicate this scourge. We must remain vigilant and continue to take all the necessary precautions and observe the advice and requirements of our health authorities.

What has happened in Victoria, then more recently in South Australia and of course overseas in the USA, the United Kingdom and Europe, shows clearly how devastating this virus can be if it is allowed to get out of control.

As residents will know Brighton Council and our community were not immune from the impact of COVID-19, but together, we responded, quickly, appropriately and responsibly. I want to thank our entire community for how you all responded and the conscientious manner in which the health advice and directions were received. We were all in this together and I am proud of how everyone coped positively with what has been such a difficult year for everyone.

Our municipality was fortunate that at the outset, Brighton Council was in a strong position financially, culturally and operationally to deal well with the unforeseen pandemic.

It is fair to say our staff and Councillors managed the situation admirably and the result is our Council and community have emerged stronger and certainly more resilient.

Of course, the effects of the pandemic, both operationally and financially, have and will, lead to some changes for Council. But many of these are positive and all of them can be managed.

But amongst all of this, it has perhaps been Council's busiest year on nearly every front. Growth and development have hit new levels and Council itself has embarked on its largest capital works program by far. So far this calendar year we have received 446 development and subdivision applications. By comparison, for the full calendar year of 2019 we received 359 applications.

Council has also begun a suite of strategic projects to set the Municipality's direction for the years ahead and to help guide more specific activities.

This strategic work includes preparation of the 2050 Vision, our Long-Term Financial Plan and the 10-Year Asset Management Plan. These are all key strategies that will guide our Municipality into the future.

Several large projects are now confirmed in the area, including the Brighton High School and the Bridgewater Bridge and it is pleasing to see the funding for these works provided in the current State Budget and the Government's Forward Estimates.

Brighton Council has also broadened its support of the community by partnering with our neighbouring councils to establish a workforce planning project employing a workplace development coordinator for the region, which is already showing great progress. We are undertaking this initiative to improve job opportunities for local communities and business growth in our respective municipal areas. The aim is to match job seekers with appropriate training and identified employment opportunities. It will also match employer requirements with training opportunities to enable the regional workforce to be job-ready as employment opportunities arise and to connect individual local jobseekers with relevant local employers.

The initial feedback is encouraging and I am confident this program will make a major contribution to the economic growth and development of the Brighton Municipality and the wider region.

This is just a snapshot of Council's work over the past year and amongst all this, we have seen the smooth transition from long-serving General Manager Ron Sanderson to our new GM, James Dryburgh. While the task has likely been somewhat different from what James first envisaged, he hit the ground running and is providing great leadership for our staff and considered advice and support for the Council.

In summary, it's certainly been a big year, with next year likely to be even bigger.

I want to thank you all for your ongoing support of our Municipality and particularly during what has been an extremely challenging time. It shows that as a community when we are faced with adversity, we can and do come out stronger, and 2020 has proven this in spades.

On behalf of Brighton Council can I wish everyone in our community a safe and enjoyable festive season with your families and friends who you may be able to re-connect with and a very happy and hopefully, relatively COVID-19-free New Year.

Tony Foster AM OAM JP
Mayor