

Future use and management of the Cooroy Memorial Hall

*Report on the outcomes of Noosa Council's
consultation with the local community*

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1. Background

On the 20th October 2016 Council agreed to accept trusteeship of the Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) for Lot 1 on Crown Plan C56038 on which the Cooroy Memorial Hall (the Hall) and the Cooroy RSL Services and Citizens Memorial Club are built.

In resolving to accept the trusteeship Council also requested that staff undertake further consultation with the Cooroy community and the Department of Mines and Natural Resources about possible future uses and management of the Cooroy Memorial Hall and then report back to Council.

2. Transfer of the DOGIT

On 13 December the Department of Natural Resources and Mines transferred the DOGIT for Lot 1 on Crown Plan C56038 to Council (Tile No 158775214, Dealing No 717710498). This transfer formalised Council's responsibility as Trustee for the Hall.

Subsequently Council's Property and Facilities Manager has insured the Hall, received the keys to the Hall and taken over functional control of the building. Council has commenced discussions with the Cooroy RSL regarding tenure over the RSL Club building.

Discussions with the Department over a land swap to solve the land tenure and building encroachment issues are ongoing.

3. Community Engagement

Between November 1 and January 31 2017 staff have carried out the following community engagement activities.

3.1 Public Meeting

A public meeting to discuss the future of the Cooroy Memorial Hall was held on Saturday 26 November 2016.

Over 120 people attended this meeting where they listened to a presentation by Council on the status of the Hall and discussed:

- potential future uses for the Hall;
- the local community's ability to contribute to the repair, maintenance and management of the Hall; and
- the possibility of replacing the Hall with a memorial or recreational park.

The clear message from those members of the community attending the meeting was that they wanted the Hall retained as a memorial building. Potential future uses for the Hall included community events and exhibitions, dance classes, weddings and possibly even markets.

There was also energy and enthusiasm from those present to contribute to the renovation of the Hall.

On the other hand, there was little support expressed at the meeting for the possibility of replacing the Hall with a memorial or recreational park.

3.2 Your Say Noosa

Following the public meeting Council established a *Cooroy Memorial Hall* YourSayNoosa website to allow discussion to continue in an online forum. The site included a range of background documents and the information presented at the Public Meeting.

Between 28 November and 31 January there were 608 visits to the site, 196 of these visitors actively engaged in the site and over 100 documents were downloaded. Of particular interest was the Independent Building Inspections report.

A number of written comments were received on the community forum component of the Your Say Noosa site.

These comments include

A community's history should be preserved as much as is possible and practicable. The hall's long history and long standing connection with large parts of the community going back generations contributes to what gives our town a sense of pride and continuity to longstanding families and a sense of continuity and stability to new families. Residents can be proud of their town when they can point out to visitors its history.

I think many of the past users will return to the hall if the hire rates are reasonable. I remember the swearing in of the councillors as a very memorable event, and the hall was perfect for the occasion. Some events certainly do just feel right there.

If grants or other ways of paying for the repairs e.g. something like the restoration of the Tait house, aren't available, I would like to see the repairs paid for by a one off levy, or a small annual levy for a specified number of years for people who cannot afford a larger one off amount. Reason for this is that Cooroy residents and Cooroy's outlying suburbs, (Lake Macdonald, Black Mountain etc) have helped to maintain the other halls in the shire from general rates since the council took them over.

The wonderful old hall will always be a 'beggar' if it relies solely upon local government handouts and public support. Generous and caring local residents have thrown their weight behind efforts to save the hall and that patronage, can only be applauded. However, the hall will continue to deteriorate unless a viable and continuing commercial revenue stream can be developed to ensure a secure future and a wholesale refurbishment of the facility to meet modern needs and usages.

I am against having commercial enterprise at the front of the building. That would completely change the character of the building.

I think the Hall would make a beautiful, romantic venue for weddings and other functions

3.3 Further Consultation

After the November public meeting, Council commenced a more focused round of consultation. Officers extended an offer to community members to meet with Council representatives to discuss ideas and concerns. This included a range of meeting formats from discussions with individuals to small groups.

In addition, a number of individuals contacted Council's Libraries and Galleries Manager saying that they wanted to meet with Council Officers to discuss how they could help save the Hall. On December 21 the Director of Community Services and the Libraries and Gallery Manager met with over 30 interested individuals to discuss the future of the Hall. At this meeting the concept of forming an Incorporated Association to work in partnership with Council to restore, manage and operate the hall was mooted.

3.4 Letters and written submissions

Following the public meeting there was a number of letters to the local community newspapers about the Hall and Council also received a handful of letters and submissions on the subject.

The sentiments expressed in these letters were generally of the opinion that the Hall was an important part of Cooroy's history which needed to be preserved, but that due to it being somewhat neglected over the past few decades it needed a facelift and an upgrade to the kitchens and the amenities.

Council received eleven written submissions which were generally more comprehensive than the online discussion. Some of the submission content included:

I believe our sense of community is supported in part by the built environment that surrounds us. In many ways it reflects our past values and endeavours and provides us with a platform for appreciating who we are and what is important to guide our future as a community. Every significant historical building that is destroyed or allowed to deteriorate beyond repair, is an attack on the past and diminishes us both as individuals and as a community, now and into the future. The Cooroy Memorial Hall and School of Arts risks being one such building. We should not let that happen.

If the hall was well maintained and more appealing in its inside appearance, the rents kept within the means of the community who use it and a friendly management that is easy to get along with, easy to obtain keys and flexible to suit the tenants within reason; I think its future could be quite grand and well supported.

I am of the belief there will be some willing volunteers including tradies that can help keep the costs down. However, I believe we need Council expertise in organizing etc.

Some of these written submissions were also concerned about the cost of refurbishing the hall, for example:

We oppose using a million dollars of ratepayers' money to do this work knowing full well that constant maintenance is going to be required to keep this old building up to standard. Very often emotions get in the way of reality and I know that the hall was erected to commemorate the returned soldiers of WW1, but a memorial garden on the site as proposed by others I am sure would be appreciated

4. Establishment of the Cooroy Memorial Hall Association

Approximately 50 members of the Cooroy community met on January 4 2017 at the Cooroy library and agreed to form the Cooroy Memorial Hall Association (CMHA).

The Association is to consist of an executive committee and two sub committees - a building sub-committee and a hall promotion and marketing sub-committee. Subsequent to the January 4 meeting

the CMHA has submitted an application for incorporation to the Office of Fair Trading which has been approved.

On January 10 members of the CMHA building sub-committee met with the Director of Community Services to discuss how they might go about assessing the condition of the building with a view to developing a project plan to undertake the necessary repairs to open the building asap.

Following this meeting on January 11th the CHMA building sub-committee undertook an inspection of the Hall to ascertain the condition of the building for themselves.

After this inspection the building sub-committee has agreed with Council that the repairs proposed by Independent Building Services are necessary, and that the costs of repairs would be in excess of the \$40,000 which the sub-committee previously believed would be needed to undertake the work.

A further meeting with the Cooroy Memorial Hall Association Executive Committee and the Director of Community Services and the Libraries and Galleries Manager occurred on January 30.

5. Options for the future use of the Hall

The public consultation undertaken over the past two months has found that while there are a wide range of opinions about what could be done with the Hall, most people in Cooroy value the Hall as an important part of their local history, and see it as an important memorial to those killed in WW1.

Members of the community are also prepared to contribute to the refurbishment and ongoing management of the Hall. As such they want to see Council quickly resolve the status of the Hall and from there the Hall restored and re-opened as soon as possible. The majority also want to see the Hall continue to be used for community rather than commercial purposes into the future.

The four potential options for the future use and management of the Hall identified below have been evaluated against this background.

5.1 Option 1: Demolish the Hall

Indicative costings to demolish the Hall are \$165,000 with an unknown cost to create a Memorial Park.

There is little expressed public support for demolishing the Hall and replacing it with a memorial or recreational Park.

Option 1 is not recommended.

5.2 Option 2: Council repairs and manages the Hall itself

As the trustee of the building, Council has been clear that it will not reopen the building until the repairs identified in the Independent Building Services report as being essential for public safety are completed.

The Independent Building Inspections report estimates the cost for Council to undertake the necessary maintenance works to safely reopen the Hall at between \$300,000 to \$400,000 and up to \$1million to bring it up to a high standard of repair.

This is a significant capital expenditure and Council staff believe that better value for money can be obtained if these works were undertaken in partnership with a community group.

Currently the Kin Kin Memorial School of Arts, Ridgewood Community Hall, Federal Memorial Hall, Pomona Memorial School of Arts, Cooran Memorial School of Arts or the Tinbeerwah Hall are all managed by community groups. This community management results in a significant saving to Council in terms of staff wages and administration costs and Council officers suggest replicating this model at the Cooroy Memorial Hall.

Option 2 is not recommended.

5.3 Option 3: Council repairs the Hall but rezones it and leases it for commercial purposes

The Hall is built on state land which is a *Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) for Recreation and Memorial Hall Purposes and for no other purpose whatsoever*.

The land is zoned Community Purposes under the Noosa Plan and the building is part of the Maple St Cooroy Character area identified in the Noosa Plan's Heritage Overlay Code, and is listed as a locally important heritage site.

While technically possible to rezone the land on which the Hall sits it would be both a long and expensive process as Council would need to purchase the DOGIT land from the State Government at commercial rates as well as having to repair the building.

Furthermore, Council could anticipate community opposition to the Hall being rezoned for commercial purposes.

Option 3 is not recommended unless all other options have been exhausted.

5.4 Option 4: Council enter into an agreement to lease with the newly formed Cooroy Memorial Hall Association

As previously discussed Council staff have had a number of productive meetings with representatives of the Cooroy Memorial Hall Association (CMHA) in the past month to discuss potential ways forward. It is evident that there is significant community intent to actively assist with the repair of the Hall and the ongoing management.

5.4.1 Repairs and Maintenance

Council staff believe that the best value for money in repairing the Hall will be obtained if these works are undertaken in partnership with a community group.

They also believe the CMHA building sub-committee which comprises an architect, a structural engineer and two builders have the necessary expertise to oversee the works.

Discussions between Council staff and the CHMA building sub-committee to develop a scope of works and project plan to undertake these works are ongoing.

Included in these discussions are options on how to fund the repairs with both parties agreeing in principle that Council and the local community should contribute to the renovations. One possible funding model being explored is for Council to match dollar for dollar any funds, donations of goods or in kind services raised or provided by the Association. These Council funds could come from the Heritage Levy.

5.4.2 Hall Management

Once the Hall has been refurbished sufficiently to reopen, it is proposed that Council lease the Hall to the CMHA to manage on a day-to-day basis with the terms and conditions of this lease being similar to those which Council has with other Hall Committees in the Shire.

Following consideration of community feedback Council officers believe Option 4 is both viable and sustainable subject to:

a) the CMHA:

- ***submitting a satisfactory project plan for repairs to the building to Council; and***
- ***submitting a satisfactory business plan for the future operation of the Hall;***

b) Council agreeing to allocate sufficient funds as a 50% contribution to the Hall restoration project.

6. Next steps

It is proposed that this report be distributed to members of the community who attended the public meeting on November 26 and also posted on the YourSayNoosa website.

After that a report will be submitted to the March round of Council meetings to decide the future uses and management of the Hall.