

Newstead 2021 President's Report for 2011/12

Geoff Park – 25th February 2013

Newstead 2021 comprises citizens formed after a summit held in May 2008. The summit was organised by our local community and included a wide range of participants including farmers, self-employed business people, professionals and school children. Inspired by the then newly-elected Federal Government's 2020 Summit, we wanted to sound out ideas - social, environmental and economic - to strengthen our community. As a result of that Summit, N2021 was formed and we have since developed a community garden, established a locally available free wi-fi service, installed new play equipment in our community playground, set up a town website and established a community project to reduce our energy use and switch to renewable energy. Our first AGM was held on the 24th May 2009. We became officially incorporated on 16th June 2009.

Projects initiated as a result of the 2008 Summit continue to provide essential and valued benefits to our community and I would like to recognise and applaud the efforts of all those involved in initiating and maintaining these projects.

The Newstead Community Garden is now recognised as an exemplar to other communities, with a regular program of workshops, in addition to the day to day activities of plot holders. The monthly Produce Exchange is always well patronized and is rapidly becoming a Newstead institution. The HMAS Bell aka the Newstead Playground is a delight to local families and attracts a regular stream of visitors from beyond our community. The Newstead website and free wi-fi provide a vital communication option for local folks within and outside the community. Newstead Landcare are steadily and creatively rehabilitating our beloved Loddon River, in the face of drought and flooding rains. Renewable Newstead has achieved much to educate our community about wise energy use and has seen encouraging uptake of new technologies including solar hot water and PV. Our aspiration to become Australia's first 100% renewable town remains in our sights, despite significant technical and political challenges.

In recent times our energies have been channeled into the development of the Newstead Community Plan. I would like to pay tribute to the wonderful work of Janet Barker, who, supported by a small committee of interested locals, has guided our efforts to engage with a broad cross-section of the community in an inclusive and respectful way. I have high hopes that the final document will not only represent the diversity of values and aspirations of the Newstead community but it will provide inspiration for other small towns and local government. Like all plans, success should be measured by the degree to which it catalyses action and galvanizes people to work together. While our plan is not yet 'over the line' it has already led to other initiatives, notably the Newstead Railway Station, hopefully reincarnated as a vibrant arts hub and 'Accessible Newstead', led by Dave Stratton.

Newstead 2021 plays a key and ongoing role within our community. It is however not without challenges. While we are an incorporated body, a number of recent events have been cause for some reflection on governance. In September 2012 we approached the Newstead RTC to discuss development of a more formal relationship between the two organisations. In the past the RTC has kindly supported N2021 as an auspice for projects, playing a key role in provision of an ABN and enabling us to receive grant funding. The door is still open to develop a collaborative model but I feel that a key issue for resolution is the acquisition of our own ABN and how we might more sensibly cover the cost of public liability insurance. Without an organisation like N2021 projects such as those outlined above would have struggled to get off the ground.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the work of our Treasurer, Kylie Richardson and Genevieve Barlow for making sure tonight's meeting happened without intervention from ASIC! Newstead is a wonderful community and it's a privilege to work with you all and other local groups in enriching our community life.