

Stockton Community Group Inc Meeting Notes
Forum with Ward 1 Councillors: Peter Gittins and Declan Clausen

Date: 12th February 2025

Venue: Stockton Surf Club, Pitt St, Stockton

Chair: Alison Rigby and Lindy Nisbett

Minutes: Carolyn Bailey

1. Meeting Opened: by Lindy Nisbett at 7.35 pm with Acknowledgement of Country

Present: Available on request

Apologies: Charlotte McCabe (Ward 1 Councillor), Scott Brooks

2. Forum outline: Councillors were sent three prepared questions prior to the forum. Councillors invited to respond to each question, followed by questions from audience.

Question 1: *The recent summer holiday period saw a significant increase in visitors and holidaymakers to Stockton. Although it is wonderful to see people enjoying the area and amenities, residents experienced an increase in antisocial behaviour. Key concerns were:*

- *Increased reports of crime including house break-ins, theft of property, car damage and vandalism.*
- *Poor traffic management and congestion, highlighting the need for improved pedestrian crossings and parking regulation.*
- *Reckless and dangerous use of e-bikes, e-scooters and trail bikes.*
- *Increase in uncontrolled dogs in both leashed and off leash areas, a significant increase in dog droppings in public access areas and limited visibility of council ranger patrols.*

How can Ward 1 Counsellors assist and support the community to address these issues within City of Newcastle (CN) and across other relevant agencies such as police?

Response (led by Peter Gittins)

- Issues of increased crime are being seen across multiple suburbs in the LGA. Concerns with under-resourcing of police acknowledged. Council is working with police to raise community concerns and explore options to improve safety. Following a cross agency meeting in Hamilton a new police liaison role will be employed this month.
- State government has undertaken a parliamentary inquiry into the issues with and regulation of E scooters and E bikes. CN (City of Newcastle) contributed to the inquiry. Report to be released today. Councillors will consider recommendations in light of safety issues raised. It was noted that E scooters are only to be used on private land.
- CN have undertaken to increase dog ranger patrols over the coming weeks.
- CN have developed a Walking & Mobility Plan, areas identified as requiring improved pedestrian safety on Stockton include Mitchell St (near Bowling Club), Corroba Oval, Cnr Mitchell & Hunter St. A schedule of works based on prioritises is yet to be released.

Question 2: *SCG Inc recently wrote to CN and Councillors with concerns the Punt Road public toilet will be closed permanently. The response from CN (see attached) highlighted the planned work to upgrade the public toilet at the ferry/skatepark, however it did not address the future of the Punt Road facility. Access to public toilets on Stockton is limited and do not meet the community need for family friendly and accessible amenities.*

Can Councillors advice on the timeframe for the ferry/skatepark toilet upgrade to be completed and how the community will be consulted on design, location and amenity?

How can Counsellors assist and support the community to progress the need for a comprehensive, planned upgrade of existing facilities and building of new amenities to meet increasing and changing demand? How can the Rawson Reserve Trust be utilised to progress such improvements?

Response (led by Declan Clausen)

- Councillors have received written assurance from CN that there is no plan to permanently close the Punt Rd public toilet and the recent closure was needed to undertake repair work.
- Upgrade of the ferry/activity hub toilets is progressing, design work currently underway, with construction planned to commence by the end of the financial year. CN have been asked to consult the community throughout the process.
- The need for planning of new and upgraded public amenities acknowledged.
- The Rawson Reserve Trust is a Crown Land fund administered by CN. The Trust receives revenue from the profits of the Stockton Holiday Park, approximately \$1 million per year. At end of 2024 the Trust balance was approx. \$4 million. Trust funds are exclusively for the purpose of Stockton Crown Land improvement. Some aspects of beach improvement have been funded through the Trust in the past. The Trust is reported on in the CN consolidated financial plan released in April.

Question 3: *Housing development in the Fern Bay/Fullerton Cove area and the shift to higher density housing in Stockton has placed increasing pressure on infrastructure. This demand will further increase with the Defence Force housing project at Fern Bay and the housing development at North Stockton (former Stockton Hospital site). The impact on already burdened infrastructure including traffic management, public transport, schools, health facilities and public amenities will be substantial.*

Despite these current and future challenges there appears to have been limited attention given to the changing profile of Stockton. How will Ward 1 Counsellors work with the community to address concerns, and opportunities, within CN and across other relevant agencies?

How can Counsellors ensure there is a coherent strategic plan for the future of Stockton?

Response (Declan Clausen and Peter Gittins)

- Councillors acknowledged the increasing demand on Stockton amenities and infrastructure from non-residents.
- CN and Port Stephens Council has previously developed joint plans for developments in the Stockton/Fern Bay area. A Master Plan was developed in 2020. Additional housing and retail developments have since been approved for the Newcastle Golf Club, Fullerton Cove and affordable housing on the former Stockton Hospital site.
- Councillors will advocate to review those planning documents in light of impacts on infrastructure and previous development cost sharing arrangements.

3. Open Forum Questions/Issues

Community members present raised the following issues:

Social needs: in the community need to be addressed, particularly for young people and when CN respond to issues that impact local businesses.

- Councillors will follow up re issues related to specific businesses.

Is there a Night Time Economy Strategy and Precinct planned for Stockton?

- Currently there is no plan to develop a strategy for Stockton. Trial of precincts is being considered for some central Newcastle suburbs.

Education needs to be part of any regulation in relation to E bikes etc.

- Education is a component of the State government review report.

Car parking signage and management was raised as an issue.

IGA Car Park: ongoing issues with flooding and maintenance of IGA car park and arcade area?

The car park and shops are privately owned.

- Council have undertaken work to ensure its drainage systems are not impacting the car park drainage systems
- Multiple attempts have been made by CN staff, Declan Clausen and SCG Inc to negotiate with the property owner without success.
- The issue with pigeons in the arcade does not meet the threshold for regulatory intervention.
- There is no regulatory requirement for the owner to ensure access to toilets for customers.

Queens Wharf Building: upgrades and ferry impacts

- Ferry staff amenities area has been repaired and reopened in the existing building
- Public consultation to be undertaken by mid-year on redevelopment of the Queens Wharf west end area.
- Options for ferry staff amenities during the redevelopment are being explored to minimise disruption to ferry service. Suggested Ferry staff amenities be considered as part of the upgrade to the Stockton ferry/activity hub amenities.
- Meetings with Keolis Downer continue to ensure ferry service is maintained.

Stockton beach restoration: when will dumping from the dredge recommence?

- The new Stockton Special Advisory Panel, chaired by Tim Crakanthorp, has been convened and met for the first time today. This Panel replaces the former Taskforce.

The Panel's website is

<https://www2.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/coasts/stockton-beach-repair-project>

Stockton patrolled beach issues: disability access to Stockton's patrolled beach needs to be improved to ensure safety of users. CN slow to respond to concerns raised including repair of the showers. Life savers need to transverse the car park from the observation tower to respond to incidents creating a work safety risk.

- Councillors asked that the community lodge issues in the first instance with CN and record the Customer Reference Number (CRN). If response from CN is unsatisfactory contact Ward 1 Councillors with an outline of the issue and the CRN to allow follow up.

Homelessness and free camping: attendees provided examples of anti-social behaviour including verbal and physical abuse of residents as the number of people living in RV's, caravans, cars and tents increases on Stockton, particularly at the south Stockton boat ramp.

- Council do not have authority to "move people on", only police can do that.
- It was acknowledged that there is a difference between the genuinely homeless who require a multi-agency response, and those that are free camping to avoid Holiday Park fees.
- Councillors undertook to investigate the issues raised further and come back to SCG Inc with options for across agency response to community concerns.
- Councillors will also work with CN re opportunities to increase ranger visibility and proactive response.

8. Meeting closed: 8:30 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 9th April 2025, Stockton Surf Life Saving Club at 7:30 pm