

School's in for the Rock

by Adem Saban

EDUCATION and community consultation on Hanging Rock are high on council's agenda, with a unanimous vote by all councillors in February's council meeting.

In a motion moved by Cr John Letchford, council has pledged to carry out a month-long community education process on the use and development of the Hanging Rock Reserve Precinct, and investigate merits in planning protection, specifically to protect the immediate area of the yet-to-be-determined-area of the Hanging Rock Precinct.

Council will also seek community comment for the period of two months, to hear submissions on the Hanging Rock Reserve Precinct Plan and council's Hanging Rock Investment Plan.

Cr John Letchford said the motion was a step forward in the Hanging Rock debate.

"The community education will be happening to clear up any misinformation and misinterpretation, and all information put into the public arena in a simple and qualified format," Cr Letchford said.

Cr Letchford said the Hanging Rock precinct would not be limited to the East Paddock and the Rock, but also the land and streets surrounding.

He said council would investigate the merits in planning protection, to protect the immediate area.

"The consultation and education is a step forward, it is what the community wanted, and will preserve the very fundamentals that they've been fighting for," Cr Letchford said.

Cr Jennifer Anderson said the motion was very important, giving the community the opportunity to make submissions.

"We're all (the councillors) happy with this decision, with the last bit being the most important. It's important that we give the public the opportunity to make submissions on the precinct and investment plans," Cr Anderson said.

Luke Spielvogel, of the Hanging Rock Action Group, said the latest resolution is not necessarily what the group was fighting for.

"We have concerns and have had issues clarifying the practical implications of council's recent resolution

regarding Hanging Rock, and any proposed program of action," Mr Spielvogel said.

"To be fair, Cr Letchford has responded a lot, both on email and social media, but without addressing any of our questions specifically. The Shire's CEO, who is responsible for interpreting and implementing this latest resolution, has not addressed any specific questions about the resolution, and how it will be interpreted or implemented."

Mr Spielvogel said the aims and concerns of the Hanging Rock Action Group have been consistent and clear.

"If council want to proceed with a category six development at Hanging Rock, they should implement their own community consultation framework. It is their own adopted policy, designed for this very scenario," Mr Spielvogel said.

"We now have this bureaucratically-worded resolution which is open to all kinds of interpretation and representation without directing any specifics.

"A Hanging Rock Reserve Precinct Plan will now be developed, at what further cost and to whom? How many

more plans do we need, we have had one for Hanging Rock and by all reports for 20 years the shire has failed to action and implement it effectively."

On the topic of the Hanging Rock Development Investment Plan, Mr Spielvogel said he is concerned about whether the community's best interests are being served.

"The plan is not publically available, so we don't know what that directs. After over six months of engagement with council and the shire, I have real concerns whether our communities and Hanging Rock's best interests are being best served," Mr Spielvogel said.

"All we are asking is due and proper process. The practical implications of this latest resolution will eventually become clear, and time will tell whether it is a genuine attempt to engage the community, or more smoke and mirrors.

"Ultimately, the Macedon Ranges residents, and Hanging Rock's supporters more broadly, will decide whether Hanging Rock's best interests are being best served."

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