

Letters to the editor

Readers have their say on important issues

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Now it's clear

Matthew Nickson, Hanging Rock Action Group

Last week in Bendigo, the Loddon Mallee Investment Prospectus was launched. Was I surprised to learn that the largest project (\$8.5 million) in the 'Investing in Tourism priority projects' section is the Hanging Rock Development and Investment Plan? No, I wasn't, because it's now clear Macedon Ranges Shire Council has been working on this project since 2010.

In May 2010, council received the final report of a study they had commissioned into accommodation opportunities within the Macedon Ranges. One of the opportunities identified was that 'There are no large internationally branded resorts

which cater to over 200 guests or delegates in the Macedon Ranges in 4.5 star accommodation or higher. Rural areas in close proximity to Mt Macedon and Hanging Rock provide a unique setting for international and interstate visitors. The facility may incorporate a range of recreational activities including geothermal spa'.

In September 2011, a consultants' brief was issued by council titled the Hanging Rock Development and Investment Plan which stated that 'A key gap in the supply of tourist accommodation as being a large internationally branded resort of conference facility in close proximity to Hanging Rock'. The consultants duly reported in early 2012 and council is currently seeking expressions of interest for this development.

In June 2013, council announced it had been successful in securing \$2.089 million for 'essential infrastructure' for Hanging Rock from the Regional Development Australia Fund. Council's media release stated 'Works will include two new visitor shelters, the supply of electricity, water and informal lighting to the main reserve and picnic grounds, improved pedestrian access and car parking, and enhancements to improve wildlife corridors and habitat'.

What the media release failed to mention was that the majority of the funding, as detailed in the application, is to provide substantially increased power and water provisions to allow for the 'possibility' of 'an accommodation and conference facility' estimated to cost 'some \$ 23 million'.