

Old Bega Hospital

Proposal for a Regional Community and Cultural Centre

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Introduction

This document outlines a proposal for a *Regional Community and Cultural Centre* at the Old Bega Hospital in south-east New South Wales. The Centre will be a regional hub to support and develop the community and the arts on the Sapphire Coast. It will attract local, interstate and international visitors to commercial and not for profit businesses. Activities will include exhibitions, events, a cafe, galleries, classes, studios, a Men's Shed, workshops and markets. It will operate in the buildings and grounds of the Old Bega Hospital, a historic and heritage precinct on the outskirts of Bega, the main service centre for the Sapphire Coast. The main building in the heritage listed precinct was severely damaged by fire in 2004, and is to be reconstructed as the core of the Regional Centre. Other historic buildings on the site are being renovated to support the Centre. Specific purpose additional buildings are planned as a staged development to make full use of this unique site.

Context

Bega Valley Shire is the largest local government area in coastal New South Wales, with an area of around 6,000 square kilometres. It is the south-eastern extremity of NSW with a coastal fringe from Wallaga Lake in the north to Cape Howe and the Victorian border in the south. Collectively this 225 km section forms the beautiful Sapphire Coast. The population in 2015 was approximately 34,000.

The Shire includes the towns of Bega, Tathra, Merimbula, Tura Beach, Wolumla, Cobargo, Bemboka, Pambula, Towamba and the former whaling port of Eden. Bermagui, Eden and Merimbula typically experience a threefold boost in their populations during the peak summer tourist period.

Long term planning objectives for the Shire are set out in the Bega Valley Shire Council's *Community Strategic Plan: Bega Valley 2030*.



Photo: Bega, a medium sized country town with a cheese based economy. It is the principal service centre for the NSW Sapphire Coast.

Bega is a thriving regional centre in the middle of the shire, away from the coast, providing commercial, government, education, health and retail services for the shire and beyond. Its role as the primary focus for service provision in the region is set out in Regional Development Australia's *Far South Coast Strategic Regional Plan 2013-2018* and the NSW Government's *South East NSW Regional Action Plan (2012)*.

Employment is, however, a problem, and many young adults leave the region to seek employment elsewhere, resulting in a change from the normal age distribution in the population. There a corresponding increase in the proportion of elderly people in the Shire. Median weekly household income in 2012 was \$848; the NSW average was \$1,237. The unemployment rate in December 2012 was 4.4% - lower than the state average which was 5.2% - reflecting the outflow of working age people from the shire.

Existing community and cultural facilities in Bega include:

- the Bega Civic Centre, formerly the town hall, in Bega's central business district. It is being reconstructed and when operational from late 2015 will attract a range of local, regional, interstate and international acts as well as providing for a range of community uses, including conferences, graduations, civic events and Council meetings. It is a much bigger venue (500 seats) than the proposed Community and Cultural Centre
- a small regional art gallery, a cooperative art gallery, a number of cafes and restaurants, two hotels and four motels, a showground, tourist information centre, a heritage centre and a community museum, a range of sporting facilities, and a number of school, church and other halls.

The Sapphire Coast does not have a centre for community groups and services; nor does it have a precinct for practising local arts and crafts people.

History of the site

The first hospital buildings were constructed on the site in 1888-89, using a mix of government and community funds. The buildings were extended and renovated until the mid 1940s, when the government and community determined to build a new hospital closer to the centre of Bega. The Old Bega Hospital remained the principal hospital for the town and surrounding areas until 1957 when the new hospital opened.

The site covers 1.6 hectares and includes five buildings that are listed as heritage in the *Bega Valley Local Environment Plan 2013*. They are not listed under state or federal heritage legislation.



Photo: The Old Bega Hospital. Aerial view looking west, early 2015. The buildings from the foreground clockwise are: the main building without its roof, the operating theatre, the morgue and a recent storage shed, the laundry (with tall chimney), nurses' quarters (at the rear), the Cottage (a recent demountable), and a garden gazebo. The Bega Men's Shed is not in the photo.

Following opening of the new hospital, the Old Hospital was used first as a hostel for boys going to Bega High School, and then to support an experimental farm run by the Department of Agriculture. Under that latter use it fell into disrepair.

A major community effort, supported by funding for the Australian Bicentenary, repaired the Hospital for its centenary in 1988.

The Old Bega Hospital Reserve, covering 1.603 ha and including the historic buildings, was reserved from sale 'for preservation of historical sites and buildings and community purposes' as Crown Reserve number R.180050 by notice in the NSW Government *Gazette* of 30 March 1990. The site is Crown land and is administered by a Reserve Trust, an incorporated body appointed under and bound by the NSW *Crown Lands Act*.

Following the 1988 restoration work, the Hospital buildings and grounds were then used for a variety of community purposes including the arts, childcare, a cafe, education and a community radio station, until the night of 2 May 2004 when the main building of the Hospital caught fire, severely damaging the roof, floors and windows, but leaving most of the brickwork, including the

chimneys, and most of the outbuildings, intact. The cause of the fire is not clear, but it seems likely that it was a fault with either the electrical system or a heater.

Since then, the minor buildings have continued to be used by community groups including the Bega Valley Weavers, the Bega Valley Potters, community radio station EDGE FM, and sundry others.

The Bega Valley Local Environment Plan 2013 zoned the site as Special Purpose, but did not designate a purpose, with the result that most uses were prohibited. Options included designating a purpose, or rezoning to Public Recreation or Private Recreation. In 2014 Council resolved to rezone the land as 'RE2 Private Recreation' as that, notwithstanding the name, gave the greatest flexibility for public use of the land. In particular, Private Recreation allows cafes, restaurants and takeaway food outlets, while Public Recreation allows only kiosks.

The Reserve Trust has prepared a management plan for the Reserve, which includes restoration and use of the historic buildings for community and cultural purposes. The Reserve Trust is seeking NSW and Federal government funding to restore the main hospital building and renovate the other historic buildings to match. The NSW Government has offered \$500,000 for the first stage, replacement of the roof of the main building, subject to funds being found to complete the project. A further \$2.5m will be required to complete the work. The intention is to complete the work to a high standard, consistent with the heritage values of the buildings as the largest remaining building of its era in the Bega Valley, and with the intended commercial and community uses.

Need for a Regional Community and Cultural Centre

Community activities on the Sapphire Coast do not have a home, a shared precinct in which people share ideas and resources and build upon each other's work. Community groups are dispersed geographically and institutionally, limiting their capacity to create synergies and work together for the common good. There is an un-met need for a well identified home for community groups from across the Coast with a range of facilities, excellent access and reasonable rates.

The arts and crafts community also lacks a home. Its display needs are partially met by a cooperative gallery and a small regional gallery in the Bega central business district and a number of private galleries along the coast. The Bega Valley Regional Gallery manages the collection of the Bega Valley Arts and Craft Society and the Shirley Hannan Trust: collections that deserve permanent display and would attract many visitors to the Coast. Shirley Hannan was an important local artist and gives her name to the Shirley Hannan National Portrait Award, a biennial award of \$50,000 hosted by the Regional Gallery.

Development of local arts and craft skills requires appropriate facilities to reduce the cost of doing business and to increase the range of equipment and technologies available to the community. Most facilities are currently provided in private homes, though the Old Hospital hosts shared potting and weaving groups in outbuildings that were not damaged by the 2004 fire. These limited shared facilities need upgrading and expansion. Additional facilities are needed for visiting arts and craft practitioners to bring skills and inspire creativity in the region, and to provide community studios and workshops for other arts including painting, printing, sculpture, welding and woodworking. Creative workers also need outlets for their products to provide them with income and continuing employment.

There are currently no facilities at all at the southern entry from the Princes Highway to Bega. Visitors need information and a place from which to get their bearings. The region needs employment. The location of the Old Hospital at the southern entry point means it can be developed to meet tourism needs and supplement the existing Tourist Information Centre in north Bega. Those needs can be combined with services for the community and the arts to make a thriving precinct,

with enough interest to ensure visitors and locals alike make a second visit. Commercial activities can take advantage of the flow of visitors to generate sales and employment. In time, planned staged development of the precinct will enable it to become a tourist destination in its own right, as well as the backbone of regional arts and community activity.

There is a need to restore the Old Bega Hospital in any event, as a heritage precinct and part of the fabric of the Bega Valley. The alternative of leaving the main building in ruin provides no financial or social return to either the community or the buildings' owners, and in time will result in structural damage and permanent loss of its heritage value. Other options considered for use of the restored buildings were tourist information centre, and sale or lease for purely private or commercial use. The objective of the Trust was to return the building to the community, which is inconsistent with purely private use; and largely inconsistent with purely commercial use, which would close off large parts of the building for public use. A tourist information centre would permit public use by the local community, but the emphasis would be on a high flow of visitors from outside the community. A tourist information centre would also require large areas of high turnover parking, including for large recreational vehicles and caravans, which would be inconsistent with the heritage character of the site. A mix of commercial and community uses, including incidental tourist information services, achieves the objectives of returning the buildings and grounds to the community, conserving the heritage character of the site, and ensuring that use of the site is financially sustainable.

Objectives for the new Centre

The Trust intends that the built, social, Aboriginal and natural heritage and other values of the Old Bega Hospital buildings and grounds be used for community purposes and to generate social and financial returns, rather than to be simply a heritage relic or left idle. It intends the buildings and site be used actively to conserve and build on regional heritage, social and cultural values. It intends to promote active public use and enjoyment of the facilities.

The management goals for the Old Bega Hospital Crown Reserve are to simultaneously:

- provide for, encourage and oversee commercial, community and cultural use of the buildings and the grounds as a Regional Community and Cultural Centre for the Sapphire Coast of New South Wales, to generate social and financial returns
- maintain the buildings, infrastructure and grounds to standards that conserve heritage values and attract and retain visitors and users.

To achieve those goals, the Trust has resolved to use the Old Bega Hospital Reserve to create, manage and maintain the physical infrastructure for a Regional Community and Cultural Centre for the Sapphire Coast, including a restored main building and renovated outbuildings.

While the Trust will create, manage and maintain the infrastructure, it will allow, contract or employ others to market, manage and maintain the operations of the Centre and ensure its viability.

The Community and Cultural Centre will create new rather than replicate existing capabilities in Bega and on the wider Sapphire Coast. It is not intended to compete with other regional businesses. The unique values of the centre - heritage, location, space - will underpin management strategies.

Fostering community groups is a major strategy for use of the Old Bega Hospital.

Facilities at the Old Bega Hospital will be made available to commercial, not for profit and charitable groups without favour to any particular user.

For community groups it will provide a base and home, with quality shared and leased accommodation, shared facilities such as office services and a front desk, long operating hours, and

low costs. It will encourage community groups to interact and learn from and help each other. A steady stream of users and visitors will bring exposure to the community services on offer. It will be highly accessible, encourage participation, assist in developing equity among the region's population, and cater for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Users will be encouraged to help each other and create synergies, e.g. by volunteering to staff a shared front desk.

Community groups and individual members of the community will be encouraged to participate in management and maintenance of the buildings and grounds and in provision of services.

The Old Bega Hospital will provide core facilities, such as office services, for shared use by community groups at minimum cost.

For the arts communities of the Sapphire Coast, the Centre will provide a home and an outlet for their creative talents. It will provide permanent spaces for practitioners to practice and share their skills, and for artists in residence to develop or bring in new talent. Gallery, exhibition and sales spaces will show visitors what the region can do and generate employment and income for artists.

To be financially self-sufficient, i.e. to have sufficient recurrent income to cover recurrent expenditure, the Centre will incorporate commercial as well as not for profit community and cultural activities.

Commercial activities will be core to the sustainability of the Centre and to generating employment. They will attract and hold visitors, as well as providing services to users of community and arts spaces.

Commercial activities may include, but are not limited to, child care, a cafe, medical practice, architectural practice, employment agency.

Users and visitors will be attracted by the cultural heritage of the buildings, which will be faithfully restored and interpreted. Outside, there will be family friendly grounds, verandahs and gardens for both formal and informal occasions, including market days and similar events attracting large crowds.

We envisage a steady flow of local and international visitors throughout the day, seven days a week. Tourists, craftspeople, artists in residence, volunteers; people coming to meetings, functions and performances; to see, buy and sell craft and produce; and coming to lessons and workshops. This will require good management, good food and good marketing.

Rents and charges will support essential services including security and utilities and cover other outgoings such as insurance. The Centre will meet all requirements to ensure the health and safety of visitors and users. Disabled access will be encouraged. Adequate parking will be provided.

The Centre will give the Hospital back to the community. Not just to Bega, but to the whole of the Sapphire Coast, and to visitors from afar. It will be a centre for the region's identity: a place where we celebrate our past, nurture our community, and can dream about our future.

Description of the venue

The site is much loved by the people of Bega and surrounding areas, and has been much missed for the decade since the fire.

The Old Hospital was a particularly fine piece of architecture in its day. It played an active role as the district's hospital. The original buildings were sympathetically extended, and outbuildings added, to accommodate growing needs up until the 1940s.

From 1988 to 2004 the buildings supported a wide range of community groups and were an excellent example of adaptive reuse of a heritage building. A surprising amount of the original fabric and detail remains. These details will be conserved in the redevelopment and be available for interpretation for visitors.

The double brick construction, pleasing room dimensions, north facing orientation, enclosed verandahs, high ceilings, timber floors and period windows will make the building an interesting and attractive place for users and visitors alike.

The Old Bega Hospital is 2km from Bega's central business district, adjacent to the southern entry to town from the Princes Highway. It has excellent access for motor vehicles, is on a local bus route, and the road from Bega (the old Princes Highway) could readily be upgraded to complete largely existing bike lanes.

It is quiet, sunny and not overly exposed to wind. The surrounding land is used primarily for grazing, with a few remaining large trees. One adjoining block, fronting onto the old Princes Highway, is zoned 'general industrial' but has not been developed. Bega is gradually extending southwards, and in time the Hospital is likely to be absorbed into the urban area.

There are five historic buildings on the site, and a two newer ones.

The historic buildings are:

- the main hospital building of 615 m² plus 212 m² of verandahs (constructed in 1888-89 and later extended). It was gutted by fire in May 2004 and is being restored at a cost of around \$3 million
- nurses quarters of 164 m² plus 66 m² of verandahs (1928), now used for a community radio station and arts and crafts workshops
- morgue, 14 m², used as a store
- laundry, 120 m² (1934-35), used by the Bega Valley Potters
- operating theatre, 50 m² (1934-35), used by the Bega Valley Weavers.

The newer buildings are:

- a demountable four room 'cottage' installed after the fire to provide temporary office and meeting spaces
- the Bega Men's Shed, which opened early in 2015.

The main building is has 17 rooms and three enclosed verandas.

The two largest areas, formerly the men's and women's public wards are suitable for large gatherings, such as: balls, exhibitions, and cinema and theatrical events. Two other rooms, adjoining these wards, are suitable for convention and large meeting uses. The original kitchen and dining room will be equipped for a cafe and related function servicing roles.

The remaining 13 rooms are spacious enough for small scale commercial sites, meetings, or group activity areas.

The total dimensions of the main building are 45m x 13m with a total floor area of 675 square metres, including the three enclosed verandas.

Additional to this are three toilets and four smaller storage rooms.

The five outbuildings more than double the available floor area.

The restored main hospital building will be at the core of the new Centre, offering a suite of rooms and spaces for a multitude of users and uses. It will have the ambience of a carefully restored heritage building with timber floors, solid walls and ornate fittings. It will have mainly north facing windows and high ceilings, making it light and airy. Wide timber doors originally designed for stretchers will ensure excellent access between rooms.

Utilities will include mains electricity, air-conditioning, town water, communications (fixed line and mobile), sealed road access, and self-contained septic sewerage system.

There is long term scope for additional buildings on the site and on adjacent land, all of which is currently undeveloped and most of which is not currently zoned. These could include east and west wings which would define a north facing courtyard in front of the main hospital building. Purpose built buildings could be leased for an art gallery and/or a museum. Other uses would be artists' studios, including semi industrial sculpture and welding workshops and space for an artist in residence. A less industrial wing could provide additional meeting and function spaces and room for quieter uses such as a dance studio, as well as storage, office and retail spaces.

Tenure, rents and charges

The site is Crown land and the government wants a proper return to the public for the use of the public land. Following completion of the work required to restore the main building and renovate the outbuildings, there will also have been a big financial investment in infrastructure. The financial return on that investment should at least cover the recurrent financial outgoings on the site, including insurance.

The site will generally be open to casual visitors at no charge.

The Trust will give effect to the Trust Handbook and related policy in determining appropriate forms of tenure, and related rents and charges, for users of the site and its facilities. Generally that means for commercial users and commercial activities that market rents will be charged. For non-commercial uses by not for profit users, rebates on market rents are applicable. Unless required otherwise:

- Charges for commercial operations, whether run by for profit or not for profit organisations, will reflect market prices for the facilities and services provided.
- Charges for not for profit non-commercial users will at least cover variable costs; that is, the additional costs incurred by use of the facilities. Where practicable, they should provide a contribution to fixed costs. Charges across different groups will be equitable.
- Charges for unfunded charitable community groups will reflect their ability to pay, up to the level of charges for not for profit groups.

Charges for services such as electricity (covering both supply and consumption charges) are additional to rents unless provided under separate accounts directly to the user. Short term hire charges will generally include services such as electricity.

Schedules

A Potential users

Commercial

Leases:

- cafe and ancillary uses including for example bookshop, tourist information services, arts and crafts sales
- surgery/architect/employment agency

Licences:

- child care
- adult and other education

Hires:

- sales
- markets
- functions
- conferences
- events.

Community

Leases:

- Men's Shed
- museum or other outdoor display
- permaculture garden

Licences:

- community radio station
- community shared front desk and office facilities

Hires:

- functions
- meetings
- markets
- events
- play groups
- adult education
- school holiday activities

Arts

Leases:

- potential for display of permanent art collections at a later date (not part of this proposal)

Licences:

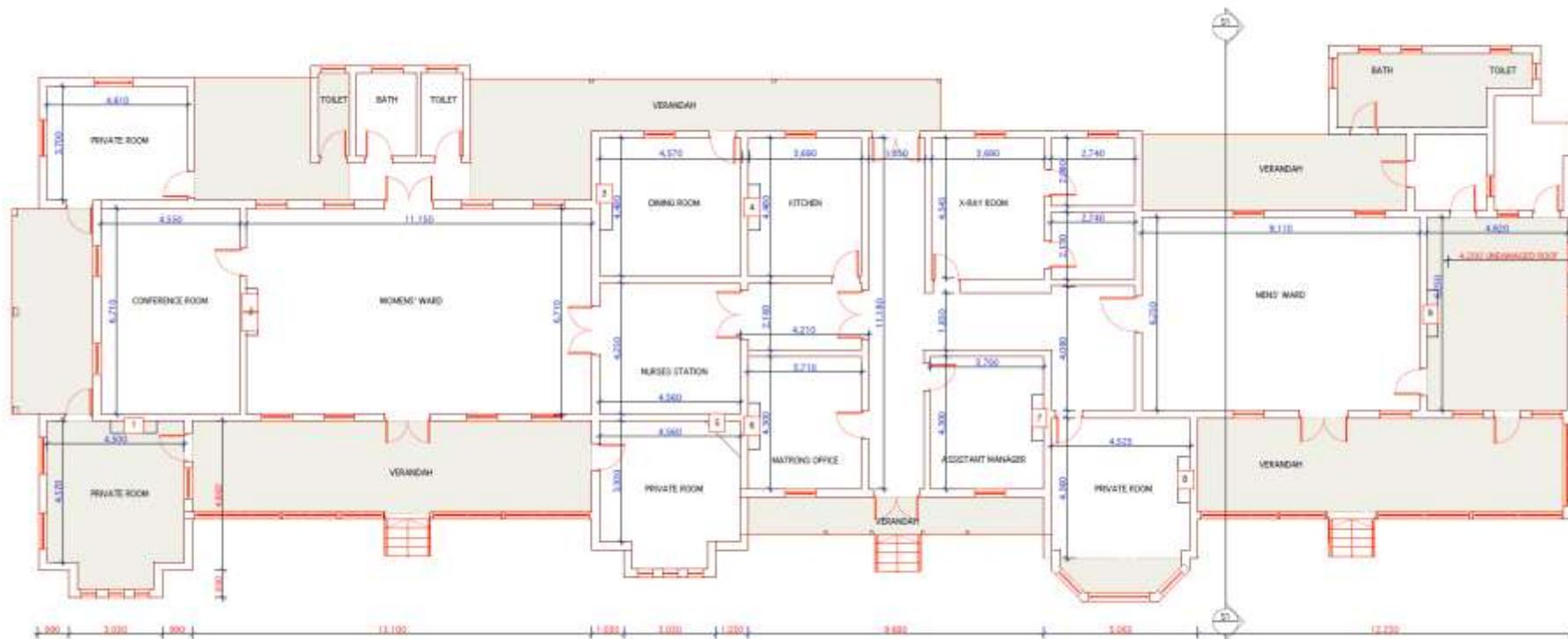
- local gallery and sales outlet
- potters workshop
- weavers workshop
- classes
- studios and workshops, including visiting artists in residence

Hires:

- exhibitions
- sales
- films
- rehearsals and performances
- dance

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B Plans



GROUND FLOOR PLAN 1:100

SHADED AREAS INDICATE INTACT EXISTING CEILINGS

Floor plan of the Old Bega Hospital main building before reconstruction. Room names are those used in Schedule C. North is downwards. Additional plans, sections and elevations are available on the Old Bega Hospital website, www.obh.org.au



Vertical aerial view of the Old Bega Hospital and its surrounds. Photo sourced from Google Earth, 15 May 2015. North is to the top, the old Princes Highway (Newtown Road) is on the left

C Room descriptions

Main Building (refer to schedule B for a plan)

Conference Room 31 m²

Private Room (1) 23 m²

Verandah (1) 39 m²

Women's Ward 74 m²

Private Room (2) 20 m²

Nurses Station 19 m²

Dining Room 21 m²

Hallway 49 m²

Assistant Manager 16 m²

Matrons Office 16 m²

Kitchen 17 m²

X Ray Rooms 30 m²

Private Room 3 24 m²

Verandah (2) 36 m²

Men's Ward 57 m²

Storage Room & Room Adjacent 35 m²

Verandah (3) 21 m²

Toilets 13 m²

Verandah (4) 57 m²

Private Room (No Access) 17 m²

Total Main Building 615 m²

Nurses' Quarters

Community radio station, 85 m²

Classroom, 32 m²

General use room with sink and storage, 37 m²

Green room, 10 m²

Toilets and store, 28 m²

Enclosed verandahs, 38 m²

Open verandahs

Morgue

Store, 14 m²

Laundry

Potters workshop, 120 m²

Operating theatre

Weavers studio, 50 m²

Store, 7 m².