

Statement from Burnie Arts Bounce Back (BABB) group Steering Committee 16th July 2021

RESPONSE TO HIRST AND MICHAEL CONNELL & ASSOCIATES DRAFT REPORT

The Burnie Arts Bounce Back group will be pushing for a deeper level of engagement and consultation with the Burnie City Council after reading the draft report about the proposed Burnie Cultural Centre.

The group is broadly representative of Burnie's arts, heritage and cultural community. It was formed as an outcome of a public meeting held on the 8th May at Europa Cafe in response to BCC's announcements regarding the restructuring of their management of cultural venues and community events.

"This response is based on a deep understanding of the qualities which are central to Burnie's identity and an appreciation of the human, social and cultural capital on which that identity has been built," says groups spokesperson Lyndal Thorne.

TEN KEY POINTS

1. CO-DESIGN - The business model outlined in the report relies on a mix of paid staff and *'...participation from a wide spectrum of community members willing to donate their time, skills and expertise to creating an exceptional arts and culture offering. (p. 41)*. This assumes considerable buy-in from the community. In the current context, this cohort are feeling belittled, disrespected, and ignored. The report takes continued volunteer engagement for granted. It is a HIGH-RISK proposition to assume a strong uptake of volunteers in the new centre.
2. BUDGET - It is an ambitious vision, an operational model very different to what is currently offered. How is this possible with a \$5 million budget? HIGH-RISK.
3. STAFFING - The vision involves community spaces, attracting a broad demographic at all hours the day. This type of environment requires a certain level of staffing for it to be adequately serviced. Staffing levels in the report are minimal. HIGH-RISK.
4. DUPLICATED VISION - The community have been presented with this vision before. Makers' Workshop was designed to be Burnie's cultural icon, working in harmony with BRAG, BAFC and BRM. It was the place which showcased Burnie's makers, told our story, provided a destination rich with place-based offerings for visitors and locals alike. Council decided it was too expensive and in 2013 handed the facility to UTAS under a peppercorn lease arrangement. It is now a shell of a building, with just one exhibition space still operating. How can the community have confidence that this will not happen again? HIGH-RISK.
5. BURNIE REGIONAL MUSEUM (BRM) - has permanent exhibitions and collections of national and state significance. The report states that the Federation St streetscape *'...does not fit with the concept proposed for the Cultural Centre'* p22. What presence will the museum have in the unified facility? If, as the report goes on to say, *could be '...operated as an attraction in its own right,'* is the expectation that this will also be a role for volunteers? See point 1 HIGH-RISK.
6. BURNIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY (BRAG) - through its 40+ year history the gallery has also developed a reputation of national significance, attracting major exhibitions and an incubator for local flagships such as the *Burnie Print Prize* and *paper on skin*. How will this reputation be preserved and continue to grow under the new model? Staffing is not reflective of a quality institution. There are also grave concerns about the maintenance of the collection during the refurbishment and under the proposed new staffing regime. HIGH-RISK.

7. PERIOD OF CLOSURE - Burnie's key tourism destinations Makers Workshop, BRAG, BRM, Creative Paper Tasmania and the Visitor Information Centre will ALL be closed (some permanently) for a significant amount of time. These are the places which define Burnie, establish our 'point of difference' and are living proof that we are the 'City of Makers'. How many 'CLOSED' sign experiences will be clocked up, shared on social media and written about in the travel blogs before the new centre reopens? How many events and exhibitions will be lost to neighbouring regions? Where is the modelling about the long-term impact on Burnie's visitation rates in the report? HIGH-RISK.
8. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - The report shows little evidence of understanding what is required for the volunteer and community component to work. In the best of circumstances this requires strategy, time, training and investment. Burnie's arts/culture and heritage community has been greatly impacted by Council's decisions – these are not the best of circumstances. The community requires time for recovery and healing. HIGH-RISK.
9. 'NEW' VISION –The personal investment made by the Burnie community towards 'value-adding' to Burnie's brand and enriching the lived experience of the city was done from a position of a shared vision, one which these skilled and generous individuals felt was worth contributing to. Suddenly we were told there is a new vision, presented with the expectation that we should, without question, jump on board. On what basis was this decided, what is the new 'vision' (we asked), and where is the evidence that a 'new' vision was necessary? HIGH-RISK.
10. HABITUAL BUDGET CUTS – Within the report, and during council's presentations about the report, there are claims that visitation is low, centres are loss makers, and they are not places for the entire community. Successive Managers, Directors and support staff at these facilities have had a deep passion to extend the offerings which their venues could provide to include a broader range of demographic groups. Rolling budget cuts and staff reductions severely curtailed their ability to make any significant progress in this area, or even sufficiently promote and develop the venues.

The committee does not disagree with all that is contained in the report, and some of the issues were addressed in the presentation by Simon Overland at the public information session. Due to the number of high-risk matters, however, we believe a clear response needs to be provided to council.

We are open to a process of addressing the issues raised. Regarding council's consultation methodology, the General Manager has advised that there are 5 levels of participation: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. Due to time and resource constraints, apparently, this current phase only allows for the 'inform' and 'consult' stages.

Council have already made and implemented a raft of permanent decisions which will impact our municipality for decades to come. This was done without *any* consultation. With the release of the Hirst report, our concerns if anything, have grown.

The committee finds itself in the same position it did when the initial announcements were made in May. We are calling for a halt to progress on council's plan until sufficient community consultation has taken place (note petition delivery 24th May with 1165 signatures). As we move deeper into the plan, it is even more imperative that the community engagement goes beyond 'Inform' and 'Consult' to *Consult, Involve, Collaborate* and *Empower*.

If this extends the time frame for the consultation – even risks accessing the \$5 million dollars - so be it.

Surely it is better to build a facility which works for our community? One where the true value of the arts to a community's wellbeing is fully integrated. One which we will all be able to proudly champion as an authentic reflection of what the Burnie community values.