

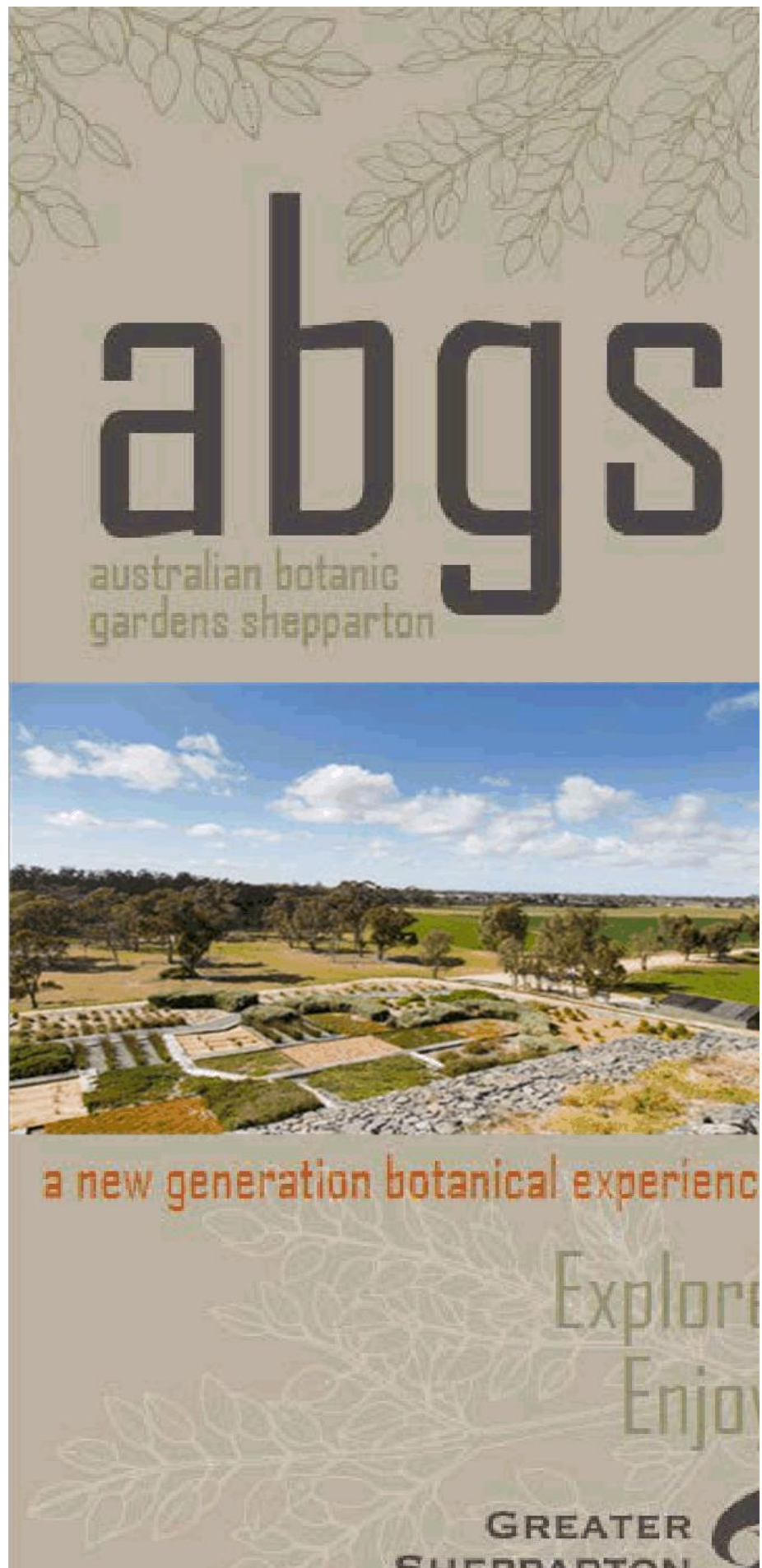
ATTACHMENT TO AGENDA ITEM

Ordinary Meeting

15 December 2015

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**ANNUAL
REPORT
2014/2015**



The Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton Committee acknowledges the support and commitment of the Councillors of Greater Shepparton City Council in the development and management of the Botanic Gardens Project.



Mission Statement

To provide an inspirational, sustainable and unique landscape which showcases local, regional and other Australian plants in a diverse environment for the purpose of enjoyment, tourism and community strengthening.

Governance

The Australian Botanic Gardens Committee is a Section 86 Committee which operates under an Instrument of Delegation which determines its functions and delegated authority.

During the 2014/15 year the ABGS Committee members were:

Council representative

Cr Jenny Houlihan: Chairperson

Community representatives

Karen Kilgour: Secretary

Chris Smith: Treasurer

Jill Grant

Ed Scholl

Lorinda Freeman

On behalf of Greater Shepparton City Council I would like to acknowledge the dedication, contribution and expertise of these committee members and thank them for their efforts and achievements during the 2014/15 year.

The work of the Committee is complemented and assisted by Council officers in relation to budgets, governance, maintenance tasks, OH&S advice and implementation. The assistance of Council staff has been most appreciated and the Committee looks forward to continuing this partnership.

I would like to make particular reference to the work carried out by Director Infrastructure Steve Bowmaker, who has put stronger organizational strategies in place and provided assistance to the Committee when planning for future needs has had to be dealt with.

The Friends of the Botanic Gardens Shepparton (FABGS):

On behalf of the ABGS Committee I wish to thank the people involved in FABGS for the great work they have been doing to support the development of the gardens and encourage people to become involved in many different ways. This organization is independent of Council but works in partnership with the Committee. The Committee provides a standing invitation to the President (or other representative) of FABGS to attend the Committee's monthly meetings to give a report, discuss issues, put forward ideas and provide information. Members of FABGS and Committee members often work in partnership at events and with fundraising activities and at fortnightly working bees. The Friends group has funded and built an interesting and attractive garden, The Turtle Garden, inside the front entrance to the botanic gardens, is working on providing seating and has funded the provision of equipment and lighting.



Development and Management Plan and Master Plan:

The Committee is working from this plan to deliver a project which encompasses designated principles which are reflected in the design, implementation and style of the gardens as well as the activities associated with the bushland areas.

These principles are:

- Community involvement
- Sustainability
- Use of Australian Plants
- Accessibility
- Use of local and recycled materials
- Local themes
- Healthy lifestyles
- Tourism
- Appreciation of our rivers
- Public Art

A review of the plan will take place during the 2015/16 year to ensure ongoing relevance.

The Master Plan for Honeysuckle Rise has been enhanced by additional detail relating to themed gardens, as each garden is developed.

For the considerable native bush areas of the site, a partnership now exists with the GBCMA and works are being governed by agreed actions for two zoned areas.

Planning is now taking place as a foundation for work during 2015/16 to progress the provision of public toilets, a large car park, a planted avenue from Riverside Drive to the ABGS entrance, an addition of a building to the Master Plan.



Activities and Achievements:

July 2014:

The Committee continued its partnership with the GBCMA to ensure that appropriate management of the native bush areas of the site occurred. This included receipt of a list of appropriate species for planting and information regarding seed planting techniques.

Due to erosion issues at the Western End of the mound where a former Four Cross Bicycle Racing Track was constructed then washed away prior to the development of the site as gardens, Council staff met with Committee members to seek a solution. As a result, Council has prepared a plan to

rectify the ongoing erosion issue and this will be acted upon as budget allocations become available over the next two years.

To assist the Friends of the Botanic Gardens, the Work for the Dole participants and the fortnightly Working Bee participants, a shadecloth structure was erected between the two shipping containers which serve as storage sheds. This provided shade and shelter and a space to develop a propagation area for growing native plants on site.

CVGT made a commitment to work with the Committee to establish a Work for the Dole Project at ABGS. This was advantageous for participants, who would have an ongoing project to work with, and for the Council project which would have a daily workforce. This has provided social, employment and economic benefit.

Following approval by the Committee for The FABGS Group to create a new garden at the entrance to the gardens, work began on 'The Turtle Garden'. This garden theme recognises the importance of the totem of the local aboriginal people, which is the 'Long-Necked Turtle'.

Council's Director Infrastructure, Steve Bowmaker, attended the July Committee meeting. His attendance was greatly appreciated as it was an opportunity to discuss the condition of the entry road to the site (Kialla Tip Road), parking, signage and where utilities infrastructure may be located in the future.

As the Committee member responsible for media and communications, Jill Grant was successful in the development and implementation of a strategy which was increasing the exposure of the gardens to the general public and interested organizations. Community radio One FM has included a regular time for ABGS updates. Requests for tours of the gardens has increased.

Construction of the raised garden beds for The Weaving Garden was advanced and feature trees ordered.

Established fortnightly Sunday working bees were continued and will be held during the entire year. There are many community volunteers who regularly attend and, on behalf of Council, the Committee takes this opportunity to thank those people for their on-going assistance and interest in the establishment of Botanic Gardens.



August 2014:

Initial discussions with Council's Communications Department about developing a website link for the ABGS Project took place.

The erosion problem created by the previous washing away of the Four Cross Bike Track was further dealt with by the purchase and spreading of several

truckloads of grey rock from the Cosgrove Boral Quarry. Suitable species for planting amongst the rocks were purchased and an experimental program commenced.

The ABGS/GBCMA partnership actions continued with the selection and poisoning of narrow strips of soil to be planted with native seed and tube stock of indigenous species.

With 'The Residence Garden' landscape design now completed the Committee's attention was focused on the delivery of this large and complex garden.

River Connect sought and were given permission to hold two events in the gardens: 'Breaky with the Birds' and a spotlight tour. This growing use of the gardens is much valued by the ABGS Committee as it reflects the delivery of the Community engagement, education and health goals of the gardens project.

The Friends of the Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton (FABGS) Group continue to apply for grants and have been successful in obtaining funds for projects which assist the development of the gardens. Work on 'The Turtle Garden' continues. The FABGS attractively presented newsletter is providing members with up-to-date information and forms to encourage people to join up.

Emerald Bank has been including information about the Botanic gardens development in their newsletter. A presentation talk was made to the U3A Shepparton group and a local Heartbeat Group was given a tour of the gardens.

The private property to the west of the Botanic Gardens site has become a virtual rubbish dump, presenting as an eyesore to those using the gardens and an environmental problem due to the rubbish being washed into the native bush area of the gardens when there is a minor or major flood. Despite attempts to deal with this through Council's Local Laws, RiverConnect and

the GBCMA, the Committee is yet to be successful in having the rubbish in the neighbouring property reduced or removed. To reduce the visual ugliness, a screen of native plants was planted along the fence line.

We were pleased to hold a tour of the site for the Curator and staff from the White Hills Botanic Gardens, a Greater Bendigo Council owned and run facility.

The Committee arranged for a large free standing sign inside the front entrance. It shows the Master Plan for the themed garden across the top of Honeysuckle Rise and also holds information brochures about the gardens for visitors.



September 2014:

The SheppARTon Festival Committee and the ABGS Committee became partners in the planning of a night time film event for the 'Unique Events in Unusual Places' activities, as part of SheppARTon Festival to be held in March, 2015.

A list of suitable species to be planted in the rock batter at the western end of the mound was compiled to guide purchase and planting.

The CVGT Work for the Dole supervisor and the Committee have developed an effective strategy for the allocation of relevant jobs and this is proceeding well. The supervisor, Alistair Wales, has been able to develop positive roles for the scheme's participants. There is recognition that the Work for the Dole Program provides a benefit to participants and a benefit to the ratepayers of Greater Shepparton as most of the Council funding is able to be directed to the purchase of landscape design work, hard materials and contractors for the delivery of the garden areas. Most maintenance and unskilled 'hands on' work to build gardens is being provided by the WFD participants and is therefore a considerable saving for ratepayers. At the same time, it has been imperative that the purchase of materials keep pace with the on-site labour force in order to maintain maximum benefit. There is a growing recognition that the Committee will need to request additional annual funding in the 2015-16 Council budget to ensure the project development proceeds efficiently.

Both The Residence Garden and The Weaving Garden projects were progressing, although being held back by the knowledge that funding was not available to complete both. They both proceeded as a staged-delivery project. The purchase of five Cauldrons for The Weaving Garden was established as a priority.

October 2014:

Progress on the delivery of some gardens was a feature, including the infrastructure and planting of species specific to each garden design and the designated ABGS Plant Collections. The Food Garden, The Terraces Garden, the Indigenous Weaving Garden and the Residence garden were all in different stages of delivery. Fortnightly working bees held by the Friends continued to add to the amount of progress being achieved in all four garden areas.

The Committee applied for large grants, with applications to Tourism Australia and Communities for Nature, but were unsuccessful.

Final arrangements were being made for the construction of 5 unique cauldrons for The Weaving Garden, to be used for growing native species which required water logged soil conditions. The cauldrons were designed and made by Les Pelle and Louise Costa (Design by Nature) then assembled on site with the assistance of volunteers, including Work for the Dole Scheme workers. They were then placed at intervals in the Weaving Garden on low mounds representing middens.



November 2014:

The Council website page for the ABGS was progressed considerably with the involvement of Sonja King from Council's Communications department. The Committee provided information required to ensure the page was attractive, informative and useful for tourists.

The security of the storage area was enhanced with the building of a security fence surrounding the two shipping/storage containers. The Committee is grateful to the Friends Group (FABGS) for their assistance with the funding and construction of this space. FABGS also committed to work towards the funding and establishment of security lights and cameras.

The Committee contacted Council officers to explore the process by which white on brown tourist road signage could be provided on Riverview Drive, The Goulburn Valley Highway at the Riverside Plaza intersection of McLennan Street Mooroopna and Watt Road.

Raised garden beds were constructed at The Weaving Garden, all plants for that garden sourced and purchased. The Residence Garden steel edgings were constructed and arrangements for bringing in sand and soil commenced.

December 2014:

As the weather became hotter, and given that there is no permanent water connected to the site, the volunteers and Work For Dole participants had to concentrate more on the task of keeping the water up to smaller plants which had not been completely established. This meant additional watering during weekends and early mornings. Occasionally, some of the larger more established plants needed to be watered as well and most of this was done by hand. This attention to watering was required right through the Summer months and emphasized the need to eventually have a more permanent system to use during times of extreme heat and dryness. The fact that most species used in the gardens are drought tolerant to an extent means that the volunteers were able to successfully nurture the young plants and losses were relatively low.

The Terraced Garden at the Western end of Honeysuckle Rise had been planted with species recommended by the GV Society for Australian Plants and this area has thrived, with many eremophilas, grevilleas and native succulents doing well in the hot, exposed north/west area of the mound. This

is evidence that the choice to restrict the species to Australian Natives was a sound one. It was noted though, that some working bee time needed to be allocated to the maintenance of that area, to ensure the terraced gardens were presented attractively.



January 2015:

Considerable work went into the research and purchasing of shade cloth for the Propagation area to be set up between the two storage containers to ensure the correct degree of shade and sunlight resulted. Thanks to the Shepparton Men's Shed for welding the panels and constructing the gates. It was agreed that the CVGT team would help paint the gates and steel security fencing in the new year.

The Friends Group decided to explore the provision of seating, including the possibility of having the Shepparton Men's Shed make some pieces from iron bark off cuts left over from The Weaving Garden.

More action was taken on preparing the native bush areas for planting, included seed provided by the GBCMA. Areas were marked out for spraying of weeds and ripping of the soil.

Cr Jenny Houlihan met with Steve Bowmaker, Director Infrastructure, to discuss the need to clarify and co-ordinate the role of both the Special Council Section 86 ABGS Committee and Council's Infrastructure Department for the purposes of developing and maintaining the botanic gardens. This was a successful exercise which resulted in a clear understanding of both roles and how staff and committee members would communicate to ensure clarity and efficiency.

Requests for speakers and tours have continued and the Gardens is receiving regular exposure in the local newspapers and on radio.

February 2015:

With several garden projects now in various stages of being constructed and maintained there was always plenty of work for both the CVGT work crew and volunteers. An interesting development is the 'ownership' of the project which is being demonstrated. Some volunteers are now deciding to visit the gardens and work, sometimes several times a week, on their 'pet' projects. It is becoming common to see individuals working in a particular place in the gardens which they have 'adopted'. Meanwhile, a growing number of people are visiting the site and using the gardens for different purposes. Some examples are:

1. Individuals running for fitness and training. The run up to the lookout is popular.
2. Little Athletics Cross Country Training every Sunday.
3. People interested in Gardens and plants who are return visitors interested in seeing the development.
4. The Live Action Role Play (LARP) Group every Sunday.
5. Local Bird watching group
6. Visitors from other Botanic Gardens – staff, Friends, managers.

7. Families for picnics.
8. People accessing the Broken River for fishing
9. School groups to do tree planting

Organisation for the SheppARTon Festival twilight film event continues, with a request from the organizers that a large sculpture made from a Dethridge Wheel by artist Tank, be located in the Lookout area during the festival. This request was willingly agreed to by the Committee and the sculpture was installed prior to the Festival.

The Committee began the process of organizing for the design of the Refugee Garden to be commenced. This was contingent upon an additional budget allocation in the mid-year budget. This request to Council was successful and the Committee was very grateful for the opportunity to proceed with this garden.



March 2015:

The website link planning for the ABGS proceeded to the draft template stage and was reviewed by the Committee.

The two SheppARTon Festival events in the gardens were a success. This consisted of the launch of the Dethridge Wheel Sculpture and a Twilight Film showing of 'The Sapphires'. In addition the Committee organised a tour of the gardens and the Friends Group held a barbeque. Alexander Lee, landscape architect from Spiire in Melbourne, kindly agreed to be interviewed on One FM radio about the history of the Landfill site and the design of the gardens at the ABGS site.

It has become increasingly obvious, with the appearance of a few sinkholes around the edges of the capped mound, that some attention to this problem is required. Steve Bowmaker is to liaise with Council's engineer to assess the erosion situation which has arisen over several years and prepare a report and plan for future rectification and future maintenance.

The painting of the two storage containers in green provided a visual improvement to the appearance of that area.

New resident to Shepparton, Audrey Hurst, encouraged the ABGS Committee to enter the Tidy Towns Sustainable Communities Awards, which the Committee agreed to. Audrey prepared the entries and entered the ABGS project in three categories: Cultural Heritage, Protection of the Environment and the Gift Fund Prize.



April 2015:

The Dethridge Wheel sculpture artist agreed to leave the sculpture in place and mentions that it is for sale. The Committee decides to look for a club or individual to purchase the sculpture as a donation to the ABGS, where it will be on permanent display.

Several Possum boxes were made and donated to the gardens by the Tatura Men's shed.

On the 15th August three members of the committee attended a one-day BGANZ Networking forum at the Botanic Gardens in Bendigo. These forums are invaluable for building support within the wider network of botanic Gardens across Victoria and Australia.

Interest came from a local Service Club for assisting with the provision of toilets at the gardens, which would be an improvement on the one portable toilet which the Committee hires from a local company. As a preliminary fact finding exercise a few members of the Committee, Council officers and a representative from the Service Club met on site to discuss the planning process required, relevant technology and a possible location.

It was realized at this stage of the year that an increase of funds in the 2015/16 Council budget was crucial for the ongoing success in the development of the gardens. Several years of planning, designing and the successful staged building of several gardens meant that there were multiple projects being managed and other themed garden spaces ready to be delivered. The daily on-site presence of work for the dole participants meant that use had to be made of that valued resource or they would go elsewhere. There were also additional maintenance tasks, as presentation of the gardens is crucial to draw visitors and keep the site safe. A tour of the gardens organized by Cr Jenny Houlihan was held in preparation for putting forward a case for additional funding. It was attended by several councillors, the CEO, 2 Directors and the Manager of CVGT. Following this, a line item of

\$100,000 was included in the Budget planning, but those funds were not available unless approved by Council for inclusion in the 2015/16 Budget.

Committee member Jill Grant was being kept busy with speaking roles at the Numurkah Garden Club and The Mooroopna Garden Club (which generously donated \$1,000), as well as taking members of the Bunbartha Karimba Garden Club for a tour of the site.

During the past several months the Committee was beginning to direct thinking towards selection of a system to record the plant collections and other plants on site. At this stage the BGANZ-developed system appeared to be favoured, although there was some fine tuning to be completed before its release to be used by BGANZ member organizations.

There was also more serious considerations being given to providing interpretive and directional signage throughout the site. It was agreed that this would go ahead if additional funding, as requested for inclusion in the 2015/16 Council budget, was approved by Council in June.

May 2015:

Progress was being made with the creation of a draft version of the ABGS website link for the Council website. With a few adjustments and the addition of new photos it would be ready to go 'live'.

The Dethridge Wheel sculpture was able to be purchased for the gardens due to a generous donation from a local family, who wished to remain anonymous. The Committee is very grateful for the donation, which achieved wide publicity in the local media and initiated further discussions by the Committee and the landscape designers about other ways to use discarded Dethridge wheels in the gardens.

The FABGS Turtle Garden was taking shape with the crazy paving almost completed and the native species soon to be planted.

Karen and Jenny have made numerous trips to the Australian Native Farm Forestry (ANFF) near Cobram to collect plants for use in the landscaped gardens and the bushland areas of the site. This nursery grows or sources many of the required plants and, as the plants are adapted to the local climate, the success rate of establishment is relatively high. They also provide most plants in tube size, which means that less money is required to complete the garden plantings. Other plants have been sourced from several other nurseries when not available from ANFF.

Although much of the steel edging of The Residence Garden has been completed, further works to deliver and spread a considerable amount of soil and purchase the hundreds of plants for this garden has to remain on hold until the Committee is certain of the amount of funding available from the Council budget for 2015/16.



June 2015:

Consolidation, maintenance, some planting and forward planning for the next twelve months was a feature of the activities during June.

It was with regret that the Committee accepted the resignation of Committee member Chris Smith and thanked him for his invaluable contribution towards establishing the botanic gardens project. The value of his engineering expertise and his work as Treasurer was of noted as a stand-out. Lorinda Freeman was also thanked for her significant contribution, particularly in relation to the links she provided between the Friends Group and the ABGS Committee. Nominations for the Committee were distributed and advertised, with applications due on July 17th.

The working link between the Committee and Council officers was strengthened with the appointment of liaison officer, Katie Wallace, plus a second officer Paul Dainton, whose role is to liaise with the Committee in the development and sustainability of the project. It has meant that a more strategic application to the roles and designated responsibilities of both the Committee and the Council officers has been possible. The availability of an engineer working part time with Council, has led to an increase in the advice available and proper attention to some issues which arise but are outside the scope of the Committee, such as erosion cap maintenance, roads, parking, fencing and footpaths.

Additional signage around the site to increase security was erected.

‘Australian Botanic Gardens’ brown and white tourism signs were erected on two high-profile locations and have resulted in an increase in visitation to the gardens. The signs are at the intersection on the Goulburn Valley Highway near Riverview Plaza and on McLennan Street in Mooroopna.

It was pleasing when Council approved a \$100,000 budget allocation for the ABGS project. As a result, plans to advance the construction of the next major garden, The Refugee Garden, and for interpretive and directional signage were advanced.

As a means of demonstrating the importance of recycling (a stated goal in the ABGS Development and Management Plan) the possible use of materials from Council's Transfer Station was advanced, with the identification of available materials completed by photographing what was available and sending that information to the landscape designer, Alexandra Lee from Spiire. Suitable materials were included in the garden design and are currently on hold at the Transfer Station in readiness for delivery to the site when required.



Cr Jenny Houlihan

Chairperson

Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton Special Committee