

Public meeting slams Shearwater development

Latrobe Council faced with a vote of no confidence

By LAUREN CAMERON

IN A public meeting held last night by Shearwater's Save Our Seaside Village group, a crowd of over 200 overwhelmingly voted to support a motion of no confidence in the Latrobe Council.

The motion will today be sent to members of state and federal parliament, demanding a public inquiry into the new commercial development, a new town centre including a major supermarket and other shops, planned 700 metres from the existing town centre.

A mere six or so hands were raised in opposition to the motion; a number dwarfed by the 200-odd hands raised in support of it.

At the meeting, which took place at the Shearwater Country Club Resort, concerned locals wanted questions answered; they wanted an assurance that the 250-square metre prohibition policy would be looked at in July by the council, they wanted evidence of any previous public notices calling for expressions of concern, they wanted answers.

Nicholas Dodd, of the Shearwater Country Club Resort, spoke on behalf of the 2300 guests who part-own the resort through a time-share arrangement.

"I've been investing in infrastructure over the past few years... This would seriously jeopardise any further investment on my behalf that would benefit the community," Mr Dodd said.

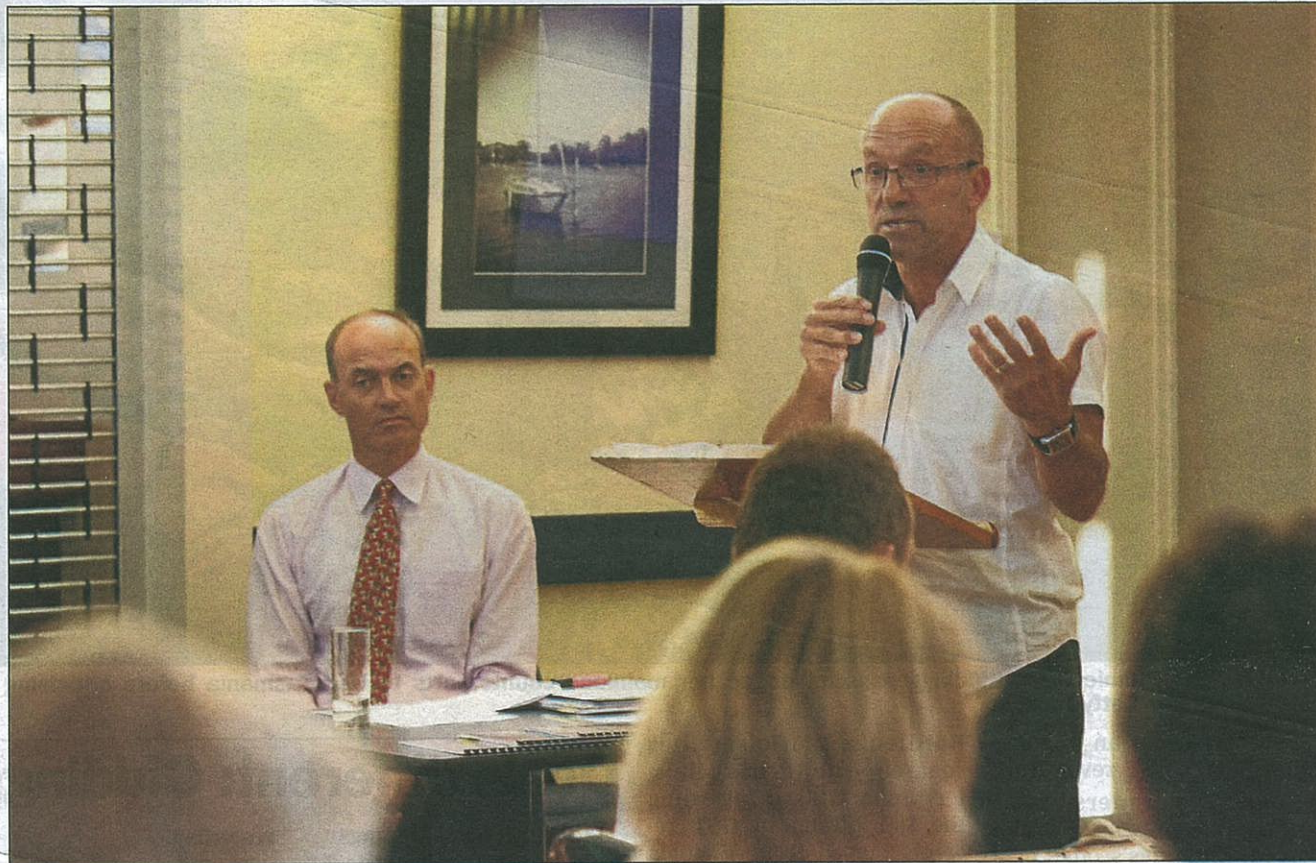
"And if I lose 50 per cent of my bottleshop revenue, which would happen once a larger competitor moved in, I'll be forced to restructure my business and shuffle workers — I don't want to do that," he said.

Shearwater Newsagent owner Emma Glover, said over time her business had donated a large number of profits to local causes.

"I'm just wondering, if Woolies move in, will they do the same?" she asked of the Latrobe councillors present.

"And how could the current population possibly be able to sustain two supermarkets, three bottleshops and two bakeries?"

Anne Lockett, a Hawley Beach resident, made reference to the damage being inflicted by gross supermarket branding on



DEFENCE: Latrobe Mayor Mike Gaffney speaks to the crowd at Wednesday night's public meeting to clear up facts regarding the new town development in Shearwater, while Guy Barnett looks on. Pictures: Heath Holden.



Senator Peter Whish-Wilson puts his view on the proposed Shearwater developments at Wednesday night's meeting.

the local farming industry.

"We don't want to have the spin-offs off more big chain stores — we can already see how that is destroying our farming trade!" she pointed out.

In a display of transparency, Latrobe Mayor Mike Gaffney and Latrobe Council general manager Gerald Monson led the audience through the

chronological history of the Alexander Street planning development.

Mr Monson pointed out that the proposed development area was zoned as commercial as early as 2006.

He also pointed out that the sale of that land to Fairbrother Construction was approved by council as early as 2007; not a mere six

weeks after "restrictive prohibitions" were introduced, which demanded retail shops in the existing Shearwater town centre not exceed 250 square metres, as claimed by the SOSV group.

Mr Monson said that in 2008-2009, Fairbrother negotiated, designed and developed stage 1 of the development, which

included a medical centre and onsite childcare centre.

"You didn't seem to have a problem with those being built," he said.

Mr Monson also rectified any accusations of the Latrobe Council concealing development plans from the public.

"We lobbied as hard as we could to get those

KEY QUOTES

Guy Barnett; Save Our Seaside Village spokesman:

"In this situation, Shearwater village is like David; it has been given two small stones and is expected to battle Goliath up the road — it's just unfair."

Nicholas Dodd, Shearwater Country Club resort:

"Business is hard enough as it is, please don't make it any harder for us."

Paul Forster, Tempt Bakery Cafe:

"We're not against competition per se — we'd welcome another bakery, but this isn't even on the same playing field."

Mike Gaffney, Mayor of Latrobe:

"What have we got to hide? Well, nothing. But the (development) plans aren't ours to give!"

Brian, Port Sorrel

resident:

"This local council doesn't care about us. And our elected members? We haven't seen them!"

Anne, Hawley Beach resident:

"I understand that the council can't stop this; I feel for them. But, can't we stop this?"

Mike Gaffney, Mayor of Latrobe:

"If I could have had a crystal ball back then and foreseen this... I wish. But I didn't. And I'm sorry that we have made you unhappy. I love living here too — this is my home."

Steve, local resident:

"I do this with a heavy heart because I thought that commonsense would prevail and it wouldn't need to come to this. But it has. I'm disappointed."



Emma Glover puts her point of view across to the audience about the proposed developments at Shearwater.

development plans from Fairbrother for the public, we were told 'no' by Fairbrother and received legal advice which told us we couldn't legally share the plans as they are intellectual property of Fairbrother," Mr Monson said.

Mr Gaffney said he was disappointed to see the words "un-Australian", "cruel hoax", "repeatedly refused" and "unjust" slashed over the pamphlet advertising the public meeting.

"I don't believe these reflect the content of discussions the council has already held with the SOSV group. We have always been prepared to sit down, hear your views, and respond openly and honestly," he said.

He said he believed taking the parliamentary route would not be fruitful to the cause and would only add to negative publicity and widespread media speculation.

"You can't just wake up one day and change a planning scheme. We are a planning authority and here we have a commercial zone and a company that has spent thousands already on that project under the rightful assumption it is theirs. We are not legally able to turn around and say, 'stop'. What will Fairbrother do? They will hire the most expensive lawyer possible and take us to court — costing ratepayers more than they could imagine. We are not prepared to do that — we can't do that," Mr Gaffney said.