

# When is a windsock more important than road safety??

## The Gracetown Cowaramup Bay Community Inc. is bitterly disappointed with this year's budget - confirmed last week by the Shire of Augusta Margaret River Council.

At the urging of the Shire, the Gracetown Cowaramup Bay Community (GCBC) has gone to great effort over the last 18 months to understand, prioritise and document the needs of both the Gracetown Community and other local users of Cowaramup Bay. We funded and undertook a widespread community consultation early last year.

The final report of that exercise, "Priority Setting - Public Release Report" was released in June 2021.

The GCBC has supplied that report to both the current and previous Shire Presidents; Councillors; and the CEO and Executive of the Shire over the last 12 months.

We have also met on several occasions with Shire Councillors and Executives, including hosted visits and tours of Gracetown and Cowaramup Bay, to point out our immediate and pressing concerns.

Two of these issues have consistently been put forward as critical priorities which have continually been neglected.

Firstly, with the explosion of the local intra-regional population and the massive growth in tourist visitation as a result of Covid.... the already dangerous Cowaramup Bay Road - especially between Caves Road and the Bay has become lethal. Both walkers and cyclists are at extreme risk from vehicles - often towing heavy trailers travelling at 80Kmh .... sometimes less than 1 metre from pedestrians or cyclists.

The Shire failed in its earlier bid to get the speed limit reduced by the Department of Main Roads.... and it was only through the efforts of the GCBC, and a full risk analysis including photographic evidence, that Main Roads reluctantly agreed to reduce the speed limit from 80Kmh to 60Kmh - but ONLY on the dangerous corner entering the Bay where there had been two serious head-on collisions in the previous years.

However, the only real fix for this, is to build a dual use pathway (cycle and pedestrian) from the Bay to Caves Road; and on into Cowaramup. The GCBC has feedback from Cowaramup and Parkwater residents that they too feel jilted that the only way to get to their beach is by motor vehicle.

This is not a new request.

The GCBC - and before it our predecessor (the Gracetown Progress Association) has been begging for this infrastructure for over 20 years.

We thought we had been listened to when the "Leeuwin Naturaliste 2050 Cycling Strategy" was formally endorsed by both the Augusta Margaret River Shire (Councillors), The WA Government via the Dept of Transport; and the City of Busselton in 2018.

In that report the Shire of Augusta Margaret River committed to

**"...work with the National Trust and (the State Government) in determining potential land access and funding requirements for the development of a shared path linking Cowaramup and Gracetown".**

The time frame agreed to by the AMRS for this was 5 years.... or by mid 2023.

Indeed, so important was this cycling link viewed that it is listed in the Leeuwin Naturaliste Cycling Strategy as a "Primary Route" ...the highest rating given to any pathway in the Strategy.

And yet here we are.... only 11 months away from the deadline agreed to by the AMRS in 2018 to achieve the above outcome and nothing has been done.

And now we find - in last week's Budget announcement - the Shire has announced the amazing sum of \$20,000 for a "feasibility study for a walk/cycle path between Cowaramup and Gracetown."

Anybody with any experience in infrastructure development will know that this is just ridiculous. Nobody is denying that developing such a path in this area is a difficult and complex task with landholding, engineering, environmental, legal, aesthetic, commercial and other challenges.

But in our minds ....to offer \$20,000 to achieve this is doing no more than allowing the Shire to pretend it is "moving forward" on this initiative and in reality it is throwing a "bone" to the residents and users of Gracetown and Cowaramup Bay.

It is ironic to note that there is even more money - \$25,000 - committed to... **"Renewal of the windsock at the Margaret River Airstrip"**

It would be interesting to know the number of people that use the Margaret River airstrip compared to those that might use a decent (safe) dual use pathway between Cowaramup and Gracetown.

The second major issue we pointed out; and have been doing so for many years; is the dire condition of the Gracetown swimming beach carpark.

It is inadequate in size, has poor surfacing, no proper drainage and is not maintained by the Shire. It also leads to significant pedestrian risk - especially to children

On high use days, vehicles (including those with boat trailers when the carpark at the boat ramp beach is full) are parked on both sides of the narrow road leading to and from the swimming beach carpark. This leaves only a reduced corridor of road for the continuing traffic into and out of Gracetown..... including all the surf traffic to and from Cobbles and Lefties carparks to the south of Gracetown.

Meanwhile local parents from Cowaramup, Parkwater and even further away in the Shire are forced to park on the road, then attempt to shepherd their kids down the main road to the beach ...dodging vehicles as they go.

The situation became so dire over last Summer... with no action forthcoming from the Shire .... that

the GCBC Committee decided to review options for improvements to address the issue ourselves...using our own funds.

In the first instance in February this year we commissioned a full professional Feature Survey of the carpark and surrounds.

The second step was for us to commission Engineers to develop a range of options as to ways to deal with the issue and mitigate the problems.

There is debate in the local community and amongst other users as to whether the carpark should be paved; or alternatively properly rehabilitated using porous material and innovative methods and thereby retain it as a properly engineered and drained non-bitumen car park.

The GCBC decided that to help residents and users decide on a preference we needed to present real, tangible and feasible options...hence the need for the second step - which the GCBC Committee had agreed to fund

However senior staff from the Shire - who we met onsite to discuss the Feature Survey stated that "the Shire should do that ....and it was not necessary for the GCBC to commission that work".

Nothing happened!!

We assumed that was because there would likely be a significant item in the budget to achieve this. So, we waited.

"Disappointed" would hardly describe our response when there was no mention at all of the Gracetown main beach carpark in the current budget. We assume that it is somehow meant to be included in the \$15,000 designated for... "development of a Gracetown masterplan for future infrastructure renewals and upgrades." (another incomprehensible amount for such an important task)

Unfortunately, the AMRS does not seem to realize that "the future" for both the above items is NOW....as we have been asking for these improvements for well over 10 years.

The time for plans and promises is over. It's time something was done!!

These are not the only challenges that this iconic part of Margaret River - both for locals and visitors alike - face. Gracetown also has issues around inadequate and antiquated public toilets; no fresh drinking water for visitors; footpaths within the township in disrepair or completely overgrown; collapsing beach shelters; no public barbecues and no playground at all. But a decent carpark and a safe road would be a nice start.

And finally....to add insult to injury ...despite the fact that we have had multiple meetings with staff and elected representatives at all levels of the Shire and have advised them of our change of name and focus...we are still referred to in the Budget paper as 'Gracetown Progress Association'!

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