

Message from the New Mayor, Cr Brian Hood

I am honoured to have been elected Mayor of Hepburn Shire Council by my colleagues. I appreciate their support, encouragement and confidence. I also acknowledge Cr Drylie's term as Mayor in what undoubtedly has been a challenging year for all of us.

In taking on the leadership role as Mayor I am mindful of the responsibility the role carries.

At the half-way point of our term as councillors, the organisation is facing numerous challenges. These include external factors such as extreme weather events and their effect on Council infrastructure, especially roads and drains.

Council is assessing the damage to roads and will implement repair works in a prioritised and systematic manner. Safety of road users is paramount.

There are also internal challenges within the organisation that must be addressed, most notably work to substantially improve Council's financial outlook so that we become a more financially sustainable organisation in the medium to long term. Important decisions must be made in order to achieve that goal.

Most importantly, outward focussed performance in customer service is in need of improvement, as evidenced by customer satisfaction survey results. The timely processing of planning applications will always be a critical service and work to update planning regulations, sadly neglected in past years, must continue as a priority so that planning regulations reflect the community's aspirations for our built and natural environments.

It should be recognised that the cumulative impact of rate capping, cost shifting, the lack of economies of scale and geographical realities make the delivery of services for which Council is responsible increasingly difficult.

These are substantial challenges for any organisation and I look forward to tackling them with my colleagues in a strategic and prioritised manner.

A strong focus on core business in the coming year and addressing fundamental challenges will enhance Council's ability to better serve our community and ultimately embrace more aspirational projects. Addressing the underlying problems will also require action and support from the State Government.

Clear, timely, informative communication and consultation will be key, as it could be argued that in its absence the disparity between community expectations and Council's financial and human capacity will only linger. There are opportunities to improve in those areas.

I look forward to working with Councillors and staff to strengthen the Hepburn Shire Council in the coming year, working with all residents and continuing my role as Coliban Ward Councillor.

Cr Brian Hood, Mayor of Hepburn Shire