



# **Attachment 7.2**

**Representation – Mansfield Cultural Heritage  
and Arts Centre**

**(8 Pages)**

## **LETTER TO COUNCIL:**

**4/7/18**

### **MCHAC**

The High Country Arts, Culture & Heritage Strategic Plan 2007-2012 adopted by Council was aimed at the “expansion of the creative, cultural and artistic capacity of the region by enhancing individual existing programs and developing new infrastructure and activities”. A key strategy identified in the Plan was “the development of a new cultural arts and heritage hub in the Mansfield Station Precinct’.

On the adoption of that Plan, MCHAC was formed to support Council to fulfil it’s objective. MCHAC meetings subsequently included the current MCHAC member groups and a Mansfield Shire staff and/or Council representative(s). That is, MCHAC was formed to work in strong partnership with the Council, and had Council representation at the table when its landmark “Mansfield Community Keeping Place .. All Things Arts and History” Concept and Business Plan document was published in 2010. This document included concept drawings which were expanded into architectural plans (Whitfield McQueen). Council was an active partner in, and involved in the funding of these initiatives.

MCHAC has more recently offered to use the knowledge of its member groups to assist Council in formulating the Project Brief for a consultancy which has since been named “The Mansfield Station Precinct Activation Project”. It also offered to make use of the now vacant booking centre by using MCHAC funds to convert it into a display and sale space for local art. After numerous meetings both of these requests were refused. A copy of the completed Project Brief was later sent to MCHAC.

Disappointed at this, MCHAC met on Monday 2/7/18 to consider how to proceed. This letter is to record MCHAC’s view on two issues, and we

would like it to take the form of a “Representation” at a Council Meeting (Item 7. on Council Agenda), so it is recorded within Council Minutes.

## **1. Refusal of Request to make use of Booking Centre:**

MCHAC would like to record its disappointment that Council has decided to leave the former MMBRTA booking centre at the Visitors’ Information Centre vacant for the last year, and now, it appears, for at least another year or more.

The submission made by MCHAC to Council to use the space for the display of artwork for from Yooralla, the Taungurung Clans and schools was at no cost to Council, and had the full support of both Yooralla and the Taungurung Clans.

The apparent reason for Council declining the offer was that it contravened a Council policy, with the only policy being cited being “Equity of Access”. This, however, made no sense, as most Council buildings and facilities are only used by certain sectors of the community, that is most facilities by their very nature do not have “equity of access”. In addition, “equity” implies a number of competing interests, and in this case there is only one interested party that came forward with a costed written plan to use the empty space.

## **2. Project Brief .. Mansfield Station Precinct Plan ... EOI**

Council are aware that MCHAC, as the only community group that has dedicated itself to carrying out the recommendations of past planning consultancies, offered to use its knowledge of the precinct’s history to assist with the Project Brief. This offer was unfortunately declined. MCHAC, having had no opportunity to have input into the Brief, would

like Council to be aware of a number of potential problems the document contains which may compromise the project.

## 1. A MAJOR COMPROMISE OF THE PRINCIPLE THE CONSULTANCY IS FOUNDED ON:

MCHAC has been told time and again that it can't have input because the project needs to start with no preconceptions .. ie the consultants should start with a level playing field and no predetermined outcome. Unfortunately, and contradicting this, the Brief contains the line:

*"The visitor services located in the VIC building are to likely be relocated and the building will thereafter offer itself as an interesting and unusual space for repurposing."*

That is, the Project Brief has already subverted a key project consultation principle by directing the consultants about a "likely" outcome. "Consultation" is thus rendered meaningless.

## 2. KEY ISSUE:

The document states as a "Key Issue":

*"Avoiding the precinct competing with existing businesses in the main commercial district of Mansfield".*

Putting a statement like this in the document risks compromising or crippling the commercial necessities of the project. In MCHAC's Concept and Business Plan, businesses such as retail outlets, a gallery, a cafe, and studio hire were all included, and with the completion of the Rail

Trail other business opportunities now exist. All *could* be seen to “compete” with existing businesses, and having this in the Project Brief will almost certainly be used for current businesses to object to the commercial ideas that are put forward. It is quite legitimate for businesses to object to public funds being used to compete with private small business, but this can be solved by a number of mechanisms, including open tendering and a contribution to construction costs.

It is, however, crucial that all business ideas are able to come to the table, and not be impeded by the wording of the Project Brief, which could later put Council in an invidious position.

### 3. LACK OF SCOPE:

What was promised was a consultancy to bring a “shovel ready” plan to the table. This should be possible for \$100,000, as long as money is not squandered on revisiting the work that has already been done (see 4, below).

Instead of producing a “shovel ready” outcome, what the Brief says is:

*Accompanying artist impressions will bring the project to life and inform a business prospectus to leverage private and public investment interest in the precinct. It is anticipated that further funding will be available in the coming financial year to progress to detailed working drawings, however, this is not part of the scope of this brief.*

and ...

*The provision of a prospectus is not in the scope of this brief.*

That is, the consultancy will not achieve what was promised, leading to another whole process and funding round, and thus even more time delays in being “shovel ready”. As previously stated, as long as the \$100,000 available is not wasted on “re-inventing the wheel”, (see below), a prospectus should be easily deliverable for \$100,000.

#### 4. RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL:

As was explained at our last face to face briefing with Council, a number of bodies of work by community and by consultants exist to say what should happen in the Station Precinct. Despite this, the Project Brief makes it sound as if this process is starting from scratch:

*A key focus of the first stage of the project is the community and stakeholder engagement process. Broad based community ownership of the vision for the precinct is key to the ongoing success of the project. Discussions with key stakeholders and interested parties will provide a thorough understanding of the competing demands for the future use of the precinct and how these can be best balanced to achieve the appropriate mix.*

This engagement has already happened a number of times for the site:

A: Office of Labour Market Adjustment (OLMA): A major and completely open community engagement process in the early 1990s led to the visions broadly outlined in Council’s “The High Country Arts, Culture & Heritage Strategic Plan 2007-2012” which had as one of its planks a “new cultural arts and heritage hub in the Mansfield Station Precinct”. This led to the formation of MCHAC.

B: David Lancashire Designs, contracted to inform the vision which led to the themes explored in the Visitors Information Centre also conducted an open-to-all community consultation which was fully documented in a report held by Council.

C: The Great Victorian Rail Trail: The High Country Collective were employed to do a community consultation, which is also held by the shire for the whole Rail Trail, but included community input into the interpretive information which was developed for the Railway Precinct.

D: “Mansfield Community Keeping Place .. All Things Art and History .. Concept and Business Plan” .. as previously discussed.

The references which are listed in the Project Brief (pp 8 & 9) include various planning documents that are relevant, but do not include any of the dedicated work that has already been done as listed above, or any of the large body of fully documented work already done by MCHAC in partnership with the Shire. While the passage of time requires the business side of the equation to be revisited, what the community wants in terms of arts, culture and history has already been decided upon a number of times, and money should not be wasted in re-visiting this. This would enable effort to be channelled into a completed Prospectus within the \$100,000 budget.

## **Conclusion:**

**Councillors will gather from the above that there is considerable disappointment within MCHAC about the decision to block access to the former booking office, and about the Project Brief. That is, however, not to acknowledge the positives about it that are not the subject of this letter. MCHAC would like Council to consider the following requests:**

**1. That the reference to the VIC being relocated be deleted from the Project Brief, as it clearly contravenes the objective of the consultancy by suggesting a predetermined outcome.**

**2. That the reference to competition with existing businesses be re-phrased at Council's discretion to avoid a potential crippling the commercial necessities of the project.**

**3. That the listed work already done over many years be acknowledged as representing the community vision for the precinct (and be incorporated into the Reference list) to enable the first stage of the project to be streamlined, making it possible for the consultants to use the time and effort saved on this to include a Prospectus in the project deliverables. We note in that regard that even although the EOI process has been started, renegotiating the emphases of the Brief is possible, and that most firms who can do such work are very capable of producing a Prospectus.**

As stated earlier, MCHAC requests that this document and accompanying email be included as a "Representation" at a Council Meeting (Item 7. on Council Agenda).