2021

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25 November 2021

Corryong Primary School Site

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Focus Groups Report

Disused Corryong Primary School Site

Focus Groups – November 2021

In November 2021, five focus groups were held to support community consultation about the future use of the disused Corryong Primary school Site. Below is a report of the feedback from the community based on the four questions:

1. What would you like to see the old Corryong Primary School site used for?
2. Would you like to keep the old primary school building and what would you like to see it used for?
3. Looking at the site from its prime location in town, what would be a good use of the site?  
   *This question was used to capture outside-the-box thinking.*
4. If you are living in Towong Shire in 10 years’ time, what would you like to see the site used for to support your lifestyle/your community?

# The Focus Groups

The focus groups comprised:

1. Six women attended a session at the Maternal and Child Health Centre in Harris Street (4 November). Overall this group expressed strong supported an integrated early childhood hub on the disused site, alongside a rural university campus and consulting rooms.
2. Twelve young people from 13 through to 20 attended a face-to-face session at the Youth Space (4 November). The young participants had a lot of ideas ranging from outdoor education related activities to art and a cycle repair shop.
3. Online community focus group held on 16 November with two attendees. The attendees were long term Corryong locals and had attended the school as children.
4. Online community focus group held on 18 November with four attendees. This group had a diverse range of interests and included support for an integrated education hub, as well as facilities for retirees.
5. Online community with five representatives of Towong Shire Council.

Most participants live in and around the Corryong township.

Each focus group session took up to an hour, with participants introduced to the questions and actively engaged in putting forward ideas. All participants were given opportunities to speak.

The following is a report of thoughts and ideas relating to each question.

# Question 1 - What would you like to see the old Corryong Primary School site used for?

## Integrated Education Centre

The theme of an integrated education centre was mentioned by four of the five groups. The urgency was demonstrated by:

* references to 50 births alone in the past 12 months
* feedback that lack of childcare is preventing growth and families (such as Snowy Hydro employees and medical staff) are not staying as a consequence
* lack of day care is preventing mothers from returning to work (with a couple of directly affected mothers amongst the attendees)

The Integrated Education Centre concept is a multi-use facility, with people introducing ideas including:

* maternal health and childcare
* before and after school care
* kindergarten
* rooms for allied health professionals (so people don’t need to drive 1.5 hours to Albury Wodonga)
* indoor play space
* agricultural education training school / TAFE
* University campus
* Special education needs facility
* Adult education programs
* First aid and other courses
* Toy library

## Outdoor Spaces Recreation

The outdoor space attracted sporty activities (mainly from the youth), such as:

* Road safety track (suggested by the mothers’ group)
* Pump/bike track (mothers’ and youth groups)
* Skatepark
* Jump line
* Water slide
* Outdoor play and adventure space for visitors

### Tourism

Ideas came forward from groups to resolve current perceived issues such as:

* Markets – having one dedicated space for regular markets to grow in comparison to Violet Town, generating visitors to Corryong. A dedicated space for markets will also allow the three markets for the Man from Snowy River Festival to take place in the same venue.
* Field Days – the oval would be a good place to host farm machinery expos and the Man from Snowy River Festival (which needs more space)

### Other

* Botanical garden (mentioned in four groups)
* Hub for botanical species
* Additional car parking
* Tourist bus parking

## Internal Spaces

Although the participants in each group were not attached to ancillary buildings on the site, they did envision buildings on the site, to be used for:

* Music
* Bookable space for clubs and businesses to meet
* Art gallery and studio
* Gift shop connected to the gallery
* Arts workshops
* Space for mental health and family planning
* Tourism accommodation

### Retirement Village

The idea of a retirement village was discussed in Focus Group 4, building on examples of inter-generational programs between seniors in nursing homes and pre-school children through to teenagers. This could be a commercial enterprise and is in proximity to the Bowls Club and other amenities.

### Gourmet Precinct

Positioning Corryong to attract tourism traffic, the idea of a distillery was put forward. This would align with the Destination Management Plan and enhance the Mt Elliot adventure playground development. The site could become a gourmet precinct with external investment. The site could become a destination in its own right.

### Social enterprise

The youth group also introduced the idea of a social enterprise such as a bike rental and repair shop.

### Accommodation

Accommodation had a mixed response. Whilst in at least one group the consensus was not to use the site for housing development, other ideas included overflow accommodation for the golf club and accommodation for nurses and teachers. The location is not suitable for tiny homes.

# Question 2 - Would you like to keep the old primary school building and what would you like to see it used for?

The overall response was that the community would like to keep the old Corryong Primary School building if possible. People were aware of an assessment being carried out on the building and believed the outcome would depend on the report.

Questions were raised about the environmental sustainability of the building, with concerns about energy bills and costs of maintenance in the future.

In the event of the CPS building remaining, ideas put forward for how the building could be used included:

### Integrated Education Hub

* Administration space
* Day care
* Early learning admin hub
* University hub (refer to Grafton model)
* Childcare and kinder

### Tourism/Economic Activities

* Guest house/bed and breakfast
* Shops
* Art studios
* Commercial art collective
* Youth Hostel
* Homeless shelter
* High Country Hall of Fame (refer to Bill Tilley, MP)
* Something to promote Upper Murray products and brand

Two groups acknowledged the need for a sustainable enterprise, and came up with specific ideas:

* Commercial crafts
* Gallery/gift shop
* Use corridors for exhibiting art
* Café
* Move Man from Snowy River Festival office from the main street and use that space for Shire workers
* Club style facility for people to get meals (pokie free)
* Rent out studio space

The thinking was to have a private enterprise involved will make the building economically viable (leasing to community with peppercorn rent will increase pressure on rate payers). It was thought the space would not be good for retail because of the design of the building/

* Use for Shire staff
* Museum
* Meeting rooms for hire – run by a cooperative

### Entertainment

* Laser tag and intensity arcade
* Indoor skate park

# Question 3 - Looking at the site from its prime location in town, what would be a good use of the site?

This question opened up the thinking of participants and produced new ideas such as:

## Accommodation

* A guest house in the main building to maintain the heritage
* Accommodation/hostel for bus groups
* Accommodation for nurses/medical staff and teachers
* Car Parking (on site of tennis courts suggested)
* Corryong has almost no approved government housing
* Disability accommodation

## Education

* Facility to attract students and researchers – attract professionals to town

## Recreation

* Indoor pool
* Sports (non-football/tennis) – such as hockey, boxing, gymnastics
* Youth space (reduce suicide risks)
* Safe after-school space for youth
* Music venue
* Move Youth Space to the site so young people can have their ‘own’ space (currently shared)
* Communal park

## Tourism and retail

* McDonalds, Country Target and/or Kmart (minority and dismissed by many in preference to supporting local businesses)
* Gift shop in the CPS building
* High Country Hall of Fame
* Snowy Hydro Tourist Info Centre (short – medium term)
* Arts and crafts

## Other

* Office for local government staff

## Not wanted

* Large retail and food chains
* Shops
* Industrial units
* Mechanics shops
* Residential
* A bespoke emergency relief centre that would be used once in 20 years

## Other Considerations

The participants responses demonstrated the understanding of a multi-use site, with considered matches of site users. This is apparent throughout the responses to all questions. One group suggested that the site be offered to Expression of Interest for innovators to come forward, such as with other sites such as Beechworth Prison and May Day Hills Asylum (also in Beechworth).

One group considered the location of the site and its proximity to the school across the main road. The use of the site would need to take into consideration the school, local amenity and street scape.

The participants preferred not to see the primary school building demolished and one group stated demolition would leave a gaping hole in the main street.

Although there is a need for disability and retirement housing, is this the best use of this space?

Council staff indicated there are already enough community halls and commercial kitchens in Corryong.

# Question 4 - If you are living in Towong Shire in 10 years’ time, what would you like to see the site used for to support your lifestyle/your community?

## Integrated Education Hub

The integrated early years hub concept was reinforced with additional focus on a safe after-school space and youth activities. The mothers group members stressed that they didn’t want to see another generation of mums still lobbying for better childcare facilities. The rationale for a successful integrated education hub would be a growing and thriving community.

## Lifestyle

Participants from two groups compared Corryong with Bright without the tourism attractions that Bright has. Both area accessible to ski fields and are of a comparable size. Bright has attractions such as a brewery, splash park, dee farm and a fish farm. Participants wanted to see Corryong evolve into a similar experience.

Ideas generated included:

* Brewery and somewhere for people to have lunch/dine – there are pubs but no outdoor eating venue
* Somewhere for farmers to retire to (not necessarily this space)
* Car parking – including a multistorey car park down by Mildren and Coysh (suggested that landscape of site lends itself to a multi-story building)
* Tourism and accommodation – hand in hand – a Gourmet Precinct that leads to employment, housing and more younger families, leading to more youth services
* Rather than putting resources in one basket – divide the site with each element supporting the others

## Today’s Youth

Youth group participants gave the message that they would stay if they had a reason to stay, including facilities such as:

* Tertiary education
* Rural university
* More accommodation
* Arts
* Multiple sport choices
* Movie theatre and film festivals
* Public outdoor arts space

Their message was “what’s not available in town contributes to why people leave”.

# Conclusion

Participants have definite ideas about potential use of the site. They identify the site as being large enough for multipurpose use. The strong desire is to keep the space for community benefit and not to introduce external retail chains. An integrated education hub is the main example of a multiuse approach, to meet the needs of parents, children, medical services, and local youth now and in the future.

An alternative approach is for tourism, arts and crafts, as income generation activities for a financially sustainable site in the long term.

The preferred state is to keep the old primary school building, although there are concerns about how it could be used and maintained.

Focus Groups Facilitation and Report  
Pat Grosse, The Community Entrepreneur

