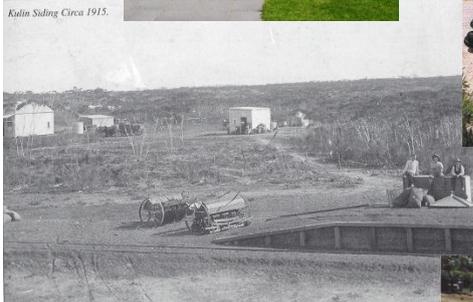


Health Check Report: Town of Kulin



Kulin Siding Circa 1915.



Prepared by Peter Kenyon (Director, Bank of I.D.E.A.S.)
for the Shire of Kulin

Preamble:

In 1994, Kulin like many small Wheatbelt towns was feeling the effects of low commodity prices, population decline and loss of services. It was a make or break time, and the Shire of Kulin instigated a 'Community Futures' Workshop where participants prioritised and initiated a number of working groups that reflected their adopted vision statement – *“To sustain and improve the local community through positive opportunities for business and quality of life. The community must lead activities, which will develop and increase the profile of Kulin and attract people in the district. The community must embrace initiatives to preserve existing businesses and services in the district. The community must remain proactive and consider all new ideas and initiatives.”* Over the following 20 years, the community of Kulin has achieved some impressive outcomes; including-

- Creation and maintenance of the iconic Kulin Bush Races event including the development of impressive event facilities, huge community volunteer mobilization and significant economic returns;
- Development of a growing tourism industry through such support initiatives as the Tin Horse Highway, new caravan park, billboards on wheels initiative, creative promotions, 24 hour fuel outlet and the RV facility.
- Recognition through numerous state awards;
- Implementation of a town beautification and watersaving strategies;
- Achievement of the first Bendigo Community Bank in WA;
- Introduction of an accommodation strategy involving the building of retirement units and new private housing;
- Introduction of new public amenities;
- Inception of state of the art recreation facilities including new Recreation Centre (incorporating all key sports' organisations) and a regional water park facility;
- Formation of a 'Cultivating Kulin' development association;
- Establishment of new community services and facilities including a Multi Purpose Health Service (including the first tele health unit in the state), Community Resource Centre, Kulin Kids Klub and a community bus; and
- Creation of a new local industry in the form of Camp Kulin attracting young people and volunteers regularly to the community.

Twenty years on, local leadership believed it was time for reflection about *‘where are we now at, and where do we want to go in the future.’* Thus, at the request of Greg Hadlow, CEO of the Shire of Kulin, the Bank of I.D.E.A.S. was asked to undertake a 'health check' exercise of the Kulin community.

This 'health check' exercise utilised 15 conversation opportunities from 2-5 February, 2015 involving a variety of Kulin residents and organisations. It incorporated two major events, namely a *“After Hours Business”* gathering and a public resident *“Community Reflections”*

Workshop/Dinner. Overall, more 130 residents participated in the conversation sessions/events, with some attending more than one event.

'What most people need is a good listening to.' (Mary Lou Casey)

'The simplest and most powerful investment any member of a community or an organisation may make in terms of community building is to begin talking with other people as though the answers mattered' (William Greider)

General Conclusion:

To use medical language - *"Kulin is doing very well on most healthy community indicators, though blood pressure is slightly on the high side and some remedial intervention through defined actions of preventative maintenance would be both timely and strategic."*

Assessment:

A. Positive Signs-

As outlined above, the achievements of Kulin in terms of social and economic development over a 20 year period is remarkable, and the combined impact of community and Shire led initiatives and leadership has clearly generated the following –

- Stabilization and growth in the town **population** (25% increase in town population);
- Exceptional **community facilities, infrastructure and services**- roads and sporting/leisure facilities are envy of many towns;
- High levels of **community passion, pride and confidence**;
- Attractive **community appearance**;
- Several **internal funding mechanisms** and local control of banking facilities;
- A strong **local government authority** that demonstrates teamwork, proactive community leadership and enjoys an exceptional level of respect in the wider community;
- Significant **profile** at regional, state and national levels;
- Strong **community participation** and self help spirit;
- A diverse local retail and support service **business base**; and
- **Tourism infrastructure and appeal** with the result of significant and growing visitor numbers and expenditure.

B. Worrying Signs-

While the positives strongly outnumber concerns, there are a number of issues that are worthy of consideration and a practical response; namely-

- **Community engagement** – generally the volunteer base is ageing and tiring. Some groups are obviously struggling to attract active participation. There is also a degree of tension caused by *'generational cultural differences'* as to volunteer expectations and organisational work patterns. In addition, some feelings of exclusion by newcomers wanting to get involved and the lack of formal recognition channels.
- **Local education**- the local school and local family loyalty to supporting their children's attendance beyond primary school is the biggest concern expressed throughout conversations. Related education issues include the dramatic budget reduction by state government, physical appearance of the school and maintenance issues and lack of parental engagement.
- **Local medical options**- the current poor medical service being offered to the town has resulted in many residents opting to visit Lake Grace or Corrigin for their medical needs. Health and education are the two most critical factors affecting population retention, yet there are no strategic plans in place to respond.
- **Shortcomings of community banking**- while the bank enjoys \$70 million customer account base, there is the awareness that greater local support especially from the farming community would lift the financial and service return to the broader community dramatically. \$100 million in accounts would see in excess of \$500,000 being annually returned to the community as a dividend. This is not an unrealistic target.
- **Youth concerns**- a conversation with students at Kulin District High School demonstrated their passion for the town and their critical issues; namely the skate park, score board at the football and lack of goal posts on the school oval!
- **Short Term Accommodation**- Lack of accommodation is the major challenge to expanding tourism in the Shire and preventing the use of town's wonderful facilities being utilised more often for regional and state conferences and events.
- **Community leadership**- there is a strong dependence on the Shire to underpin and support initiatives and local infrastructure resulting in a *'big brother'* relationship. *'If there is a problem, Council will fix it'* is the mindset. This is best expressed in the operation of the Recreation Centre where there is limited sense of a community ownership and responsibility. The town community development organisation, *Cultivating Kulin*, is currently dormant in its role, and no community leadership development strategy exists.
- **Youth activities**- concern over limited recreation options for older children and teenagers, and the state of the skate park.
- **Food service options**- the lack of a range of eating venues was a common complaint, and detracted from perceived quality of life.

- **Threat of Shire amalgamation-** this was seen as a potential threat in the medium to long term, and the catastrophic impact of losing a Shire presence and focus given the current Shire's impressive track record and leadership.
- **Tier 3 rail system-** a real sense of disappointment over the current situation and lack of state government support.
- **'Telling the story'**- there was recognition that that the town and its organisations were not overly good at *'telling the story'* and their impressive achievements and advantages.

C. Community Priorities-

At the Community Reflections Workshop (4/2/15) attended by 55 residents, the following were the clear priorities as identified through their voting, and reflect the above concerns –

- Supporting the local school, especially a thriving high school – 42 votes
- Creating short term accommodation options- 31 votes
- Improving the medical/doctor situation – 25 votes
- Regaining the Tier 3 rail system – 23 votes
- Retaining and growing Camp Kulin – 14 votes
- Creating a youth group and more youth activities – 12 votes
- Establishing a roadhouse – 10 votes
- Retaining and growing the Community Bank – 9 votes
- Retaining the local Shire – 8 votes
- Creating a school boarding facility – 8 votes
- Eliminating the drug culture – 7 votes
- Embracing new leadership – 4 votes

The above list certainly give some indication of what residents see as the issues that require focus by the town's leadership and organisation. See Appendix 1 for a total summary of what residents feel needs to be retained, regained, changed and introduced, and Appendix 2 for the 'Resident Ideas Suggestions'.

'The best way to predict the future is to create it.' (Peter Drucker)

D. Recommended Actions-

1. Undertake a systematic **asset mapping exercise** of the town's diverse assets – people passions, skills, hobbies and connections; physical resources; organisations; ex resident skills and connections; heritage and stories; economic and business assets etc. Utilise this new knowledge for developing youth activities and adult education programs; growing volunteer base; tourism promotion etc

'No community knows what it needs, until it first knows what it has.' (Cormac Russell)

2. Redefine the **working relationship** (including use of Shire staff use) between Council and community groups through the use of clear MOUs.
3. Develop a **Kulin Volunteer Strategy** that focuses less on '*committee participation*' and more on '*task ownership*', and strengths '*reward and recognition*' behaviours. Strong sentiment expressed about more personalized approaches to engagement.

'People who care are a community's greatest asset.' (Paul Born)

4. Utilise the **2016 Centenary of the Kulin School** to mobilise community support around its local school and its future. This is an opportunity to achieve physical appearance upgrade, prepare a Local Education Strategy (see below) and implement a significant school reunion event that has ongoing social and economic benefits.
5. Meet with **high school students of Kulin District High School** to learn more of their concerns, and implement quickly their suggestions relating to such facilities as the skate park, score board and goal posts.
6. Form a local Taskforce and develop a **Local Education Strategy**.
7. Use appropriate expertise to improve **communications and '*telling the story*'** needs of various organisations.
8. Form a local taskgroup to develop a **Local Health Services Strategy**.
9. Develop a **Facility Marketing Plan** to promote Kulin's unique set of facilities for holding state/regional events, conferences and family gatherings.

10. Develop a **Community Bank Marketing and Engagement Strategy** that sees bank accounts rise by \$30 million.
11. Utilise the current **Recreation Centre staff** transition phase to restructure staffing responsibilities to incorporate a strong events/marketing focus.
12. Prepare a **Kulin Leadership Development Strategy** that utilises regional, state, national and international leadership development opportunities.

‘ Given the task of rejuvenating a region and the choice of \$50 million, or \$2 million and 20 committed local leaders, we would choose the smaller amount of money and the committed leaders’. (McKinsey and Company (1994) Lead Local Compete Global: Unlocking the Growth of Australia’s Regions)

13. Create a **quarterly Town Leadership Lunch** that brings together key leader personnel to reflect collaboratively on town opportunities and challenges and seek *‘collective impact.’*
14. Reactive the *‘Cultivating Kulin Committee’* as the key coordinating community development mechanism.
15. Form a local Taskgroup to brainstorm and implement actions to create the Recreation Centre as the **town socializing space** – special events, cosy décor etc
16. Form a local Taskgroup to research and identify options for **attracting new services** to the community.
17. Create an **annual meeting for representatives of Kulin organisations and service groups who contribute money or time** to review town priorities and opportunities to achieve *‘collective impact.’*

‘The future of every community lies in capturing the passion, imagination, and resources of its people’.
(Ernesto Sirolli)

Appendix 1: 'Community Reflections' Workshop Opinions

Below is a summary of the thoughts expressed by participants at the Community Reflections Workshop on 4/2/15.

Retain:

- Population including younger and retired generations
- High School
- Identity
- Shire and independence
- Community Bank
- Kulin Bush Races
- Camp Kulin
- Opportunity obsession spirit
- Police presence
- Tourists
- Long serving and town committed council staff
- Tin Horse Highway identity
- Community spirit, passion, participation, volunteers, progressive thinking and accept change with gusto
- Newsletter
- Medical services
- Childcare services
- PEEK
- Greenness of town centre – oasis feeling
- Friendly, welcoming and loyal community
- Emergency services
- Sporting and service clubs
- Freebairn Recreation Centre
- Waterslide
- Standard of living
- Community safety and awareness
- Focus on high standard roads
- Focus on tourism and town infrastructure
- Social cohesion
- Generosity of spirit of many families
- Waterslide light at night

Regain:

- Thriving high school and strong school numbers
- Tier 3 rail system
- Stable medical/doctor system
- Youthful enthusiasm
- Useful employment
- Townpride / appearance
- Specialist services- town doctor, electrician, plumber, vet, boiler maker, engineering, panel beater
- More willing volunteers
- Families
- Volunteer recognition awards

Change:

- Belief in the local school- confidence in the quality of education provided
- Embrace change
- Build greater sense of community ownership
- Upgrade the pub
- Greater volunteerism
- New leadership
- Drug culture
- Get more people banking locally
- Succession plan for organisations
- Residents expecting everything to be free or cheap – a *'culture of entitlement'*
- More businesses and service open on weekend
- No empty shops
- No empty houses
- Use talent pool in community to increase activities especially for youth
- Maintain and use heritage buildings, especially in main street
- Heat the swimming pool and extend season
- Revamp the skate park
- Improve town signage especially with bypass and Tin Horse Highway
- Reactivate *'Cultivating Kulin Committee'*
- Improve footpaths
- Improved business customer service
- School painted

- Reduce fire hazard on road verges (volunteer effort)
- Greater use of Recreation Centre
- More recycling initiatives
- Smarter business frontages
- More pride in home appearances
- More single men over 30!
- More single men over 25!
- Greater support for the PEEK group
- More availability of quality rentable housing
- Work with CHH – tourism, training
- Change industry practices to improve the environment
- Allowing others to volunteer
- More use of school facilities

Create:

- Youth Group
- Local doctor
- More short term accommodation
- Adult education options
- More regular small events
- Shop local incentives and local loyalty
- School boarding facility for children from East Kulin and surrounding towns
- More summer activities and sports
- More cultural activities
- Major celebration for 100th year centenary of school
- Use 100th year celebration to build an ex student support network
- After school activities
- Outdoor cinema
- HR person in the Regional Local Government Organisation to assist with staff issues
- Regular family orientated functions/dances
- 10 room motel with restaurant attached
- Introduce scouts and cadets
- Playground at the Recreation Centre
- More public art – create a walking Tin Horse tour in town

Appendix 2: Resident Idea Suggestions

Below is a the list of practical suggestions shared by residents in conversations and through the use of 'Big Idea Cards'. They help to illustrate many of the opinions expressed in Appendix 1.

- Short term accommodation – eco units in bush near caravan park, renovation of old houses in township, use of ralway carriages, use of transportable houses, use of unused farm houses
- Greater use of trade centre for school and adult education opportunities
- Summer cinema
- New sexual activities for population growth!
- Ban the pill to expand population!
- Time and temperature sign
- Bakery
- Community clean-ups
- Friday meals at the Recreation Centre
- Winery/brewery
- Flour mill
- Pin up board in town for notices
- Diving boards
- Goal posts at school oval
- Repair score board
- Cemetery improvements – gazebo, niche wall
- Youth group for older children
- Non teaching staff relinquishing their '*permanency*'
- Job agency to coordinate backpacker employment
- Greater use of the Trade Training Centre
- Bring back old town rivalries (East Kulin vs West Kulin competitions)
- Co working space for workers to work from Kulin rather than based in Perth
- Farm tours
- Value adding to farm produce
- Repaint the tin horses
- Celebrate special days for special groups – farmers, retired, teachers etc
- Native playground
- More '*Kulin By Night*' type initiatives
- Rail tours especially for Kulin Races weekend
- Don't let Robbo leave town!
- Attract an antique shop
- Dances in the Hall

- Community Owned hotel
- Press our own oil- olives, sandalwood
- List of services
- Drive in