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Strategic Focus Area: Live.Access.Connect

Hughes Creek Bridge

Problem and opportunity:

The bridge over the Hughes Creek at Avenel is an important heritage asset and a significant visitor attraction for the town. The sandstone bridge was built in 1859 and is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR number H1445). The VHR Statement of Significance, dated 19 May 1999 notes that:

"The Hughes Creek Bridge on the Hume Highway at Avenel was erected in 1859 by the Board of Land and Works and replaced a timber bridge erected in 1847. The contractor was Hugh Dalrymple. It is constructed in rusticated sandstone and comprises six segmental arches supported on piers. The restrictive width of the bridge resulted in the construction of a new bridge over Hughes Creek in 1970.

"This is a fine example of nineteenth century bridge design. It is superbly constructed and stands as a monument to the early stonemasons and road engineers of Victoria. It is well composed and articulated by rusticated voussoirs, imposts and string courses and is notable for its number of arches. The fine quality stone and stonework is a distinctive feature. The bridge is picturesquely situated in a park-like setting.

"The Hughes Creek Bridge survives intact and shows little sign of structural decay. It is presently used solely for pedestrian traffic."

In the 25 years since the Statement of Significance was written, however, the bridge has started to show signs of decay.

In June 2023, following the October 2022 floods, Heritage Victoria issued the '2022 Flood Audit Heritage Victoria Bridge over Hughes Creek, Avenel– H1445'. While finding the bridge remained structurally sound, the Audit identified pre-existing damage to the stonework, noting that:

"Stones are missing, broken and delaminating, some repair has been done with inappropriate cement rather than lime-based mortars, and in places mortar has disintegrated, and it is clear that a full condition assessment is required to determine the priorities for conservation actions involving the replacement of stones and repointing of mortar."

The Audit also stated that a condition assessment "will greatly assist with prioritising and implementing maintenance and conservation works, which are required to ensure the longevity of the bridge. A well-maintained structure will be more resilient through future floods."

A condition assessment is also required before Heritage Victoria could consider and grant any permits for conservation works to the bridge.

Strathbogie Shire Council is delegated land manager for the bridge. I understand there is currently no provision in Council's forward Capital Budget for the condition assessment recommended by Heritage Victoria.

While understanding there are many structures in the Shire that require repair or replacement, particularly following the 2022 floods, the Hughes Creek bridge at Avenel is a

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valuable heritage, tourism and community asset that needs Council to plan for its maintenance and preservation.

References:

- <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/34>
- 2022 Flood Audit - Heritage Victoria - Bridge over Hughes Creek, Avenel– H1445

How does it affect or impact the community?

The bridge over the Hughes Creek is valued by the Avenel community, not only as one of the few structures in Avenel with Heritage Register status, but as the pre-eminent representation of the historic character of the Avenel township.

The bridge is also an important visitor and economic asset attracting visitors to Avenel and the region. It is promoted as a historic heritage site in state and regional tourism publications and websites, particularly for visitors following the Ned Kelly touring route through Northeast Victoria:

"Hughes Creek was named after the first settler in Avenel, for many years it was a popular overnight stop for drovers. The bridge was built in 1859 by contractor Hugh Dalrymple for the Board of Lands and Works in Victoria.

The Historic Hughes Creek Bridge is perhaps better known for its association to Ned Kelly. At the age of 11, Ned rescued Richard Shelton who had fallen into the creek after trying to cross over on a tree bridge. The incident occurred only 150 metres downstream from the Bridge.

A green silk cummerbund was awarded to Ned for his bravery by Richard's parents. Ned was wearing the cummerbund when he was captured at the Siege of Glenrowan." (<https://www.strathbogiestory.com/new-gallery-5>)

Further deterioration of the condition of the bridge will diminish its attraction for visitors.

The bridge is also used by Council and the community as the visual representation and branding of Avenel's historic character. Most recently, following community consultation for Council's Avenel Township Signage Project, the bridge was adopted as the symbol to be used on Avenel's town entry signs.

A plan for conservation repair and maintenance of the bridge is critical to preserve its heritage, tourism, economic and community values to the township of Avenel and to the Strathbogie Shire.

References:

- <https://www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au/things-to-do/tourism/our-natural-attractions>
- <https://www.strathbogiestory.com/new-gallery-5>
- <https://www.visitmelbourne.com/regions/high-country/see-and-do/art-and-culture/history-and-heritage/historic-hughes-creek-bridge>
- <https://nedkellytouringroute.com.au/destinations/avenel/>
- https://hdp-au-prod-app-strath-share-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2816/9343/7177/202308_SSC_Avenel_Township_Signage_Proposal-min.pdf

Field Code Changed

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What is your idea and what difference would it make?

My Pitch My Project proposal is that Council allocate funds in the 2024/25 Budget to implement Action Item 1 in the 2022 Heritage Victoria Audit for the Bridge over Hughes Creek, Avenel, to:

"Engage an experienced heritage consultant with experience in conservation of sandstone structures' to 'provide advice, detail, and document proposed works..."

The proposal is consistent with Council Plan Strategic focus area 2: Live.Access.Connect and would contribute to Action 2.1.1 "Complete an Asset Plan to guide future investment in buildings, plant and infrastructure through the 10 Year Capital Budget."

A condition assessment by an experienced heritage consultant is a necessary prerequisite for any future applications for heritage permits and or external funding to carry out the conservation works to repair the damage to the bridge.

Further information:

The proposal is consistent with the following Themes, Objectives and Projects in the Avenel Community Plan 2022-26:

Theme 1: Liveable Avenel

- Objective: Maintenance of Avenel's village atmosphere, heritage and lifestyle

Theme 2: Economy and Business

- Objective: Promote Avenel as a regional and state-wide visitor destination

Theme 3: Arts, Culture and Event

- Project: Support maintenance of heritage and historic buildings and sites