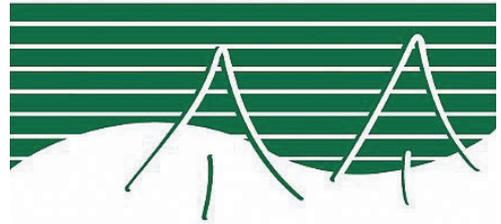


newsletter no. 2
december 2017

OBERON



OBERON COUNCIL

A community meeting was held on 28 November 2017 at the Oberon RSL club. Approximately 40 community members attended, and many contributed with comments and questions.

This newsletter focusses on providing additional information to the public from queries raised at the public meeting. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has also been produced in an attempt to answer some of the questions raised in the public meeting. This document is attached to the newsletter.

A summary of the key issues from the Options Report is included in Section 6 of this newsletter. The full Hunter H2O Options report is available in pdf format, by contacting Council on (02) 63298100

If you have additional questions, or you want to receive more information, please contact Chris Schumacher. Contact details are provided at the end of the newsletter.



from the
Mayor

It was good to see so many community members attending the first consultation meeting held on November 28. There was a frank and honest exchange of views with the ongoing rate charge which would result from a reticulated sewerage connection to East Oberon, appearing to be the main concern. All community issues raised have been listened to and will be addressed over the coming months. I reiterate that at this point in time council has not resolved to proceed with the implementation of this project but would like to engage with our ratepayers to seek a way

forward. This second newsletter is part of the ongoing consultation and information phase of the proposed project. Council is providing you with answers to all questions raised at the public meeting, and will continue to do so throughout the consultation process. Council's commitment is to be open and honest with the community, should you have specific queries not addressed so far, I encourage you to make an appointment with Engineering Director Chris Schumacher, General Manager Gary Wallace or myself to discuss.

Kathy Sajowitz - Mayor

1 Proposed Low Pressure Sewerage System

Council commissioned Hunter H2O (formerly Hunter Water Australia) to investigate technologies and prepare an Options Report. This was the first step, and was the basis for the proposed scheme.

The analysis concluded that either a low-pressure sewerage system or a gravity sewerage system would be the most suitable options for consideration. Based upon the recommendation, ease of construction and cost the low pressure sewerage system has been the focus for East Oberon residents and Stratford Downs comprising of a pumping pit on each property. A grinder pump installed in the pit pumps, the wastewater is transferred to a network of pipes onto the sewage treatment plant.

The existing pipe connecting the house to the existing septic system would typically be 100 mm diameter. It is proposed to intercept the 100mm pipe and connect it to the new collection well. The gravity pipe allows for smooth flow between the house and pit. The grinder pump in the pit breaks up the solids and the slurry is pumped through a 50 mm diameter pipe. As more pumps are joined to the pipe network, the main carrier pipe diameter increases to 63 mm and then 75 mm pumping sewerage back to the Sewerage Treatment Plant.

Concerns were raised that low pressure sewerage systems are unreliable. However, the evidence from a number of councils in NSW where low pressure systems have been operational is that there are no reliability issues with these systems. Please refer to the Case Studies identified in this newsletter for further reference of Low Pressure Sewerage Systems.

The pumping pit will be located in consultation with the homeowner. Typically, it would be located within 10 m of the existing house, and be sited to minimise the impact on structures and gardens. If there are any plans, or ideas, about redeveloping the block or building an extension to the house, this will be considered when locating the pit.

2 Financial Impact on Customers

The project is funded by Oberon Council, with financial

contribution from the NSW Government. The project costs are the capital investment including the pumping pits, the reticulation pipes and the connection of the home plumbing to the pumping pits. These will be paid by Council through the successful State Government grant funding for this project.

Should the project proceed Residents will be responsible for paying sewerage charges, currently \$615 per annum 2017/2018. This is approximately the median charge of Local Government Council Customers in regional NSW.

There was a concern that sewerage charges are higher in councils where low pressure sewerage systems are installed. There is no correlation between the sewerage charges by councils and the installation of low pressure sewerage systems. The low pressure sewerage system has the overall lowest cost of all the available reticulated sewerage technologies, as referenced within the Hunter H2O Option Report.

There will no impact on the water supply charges. The water supply fund and the sewerage fund are managed independently by Council, and there are no cross subsidies between the two funds.

Concern has been raised in relation to Councils offset of power supply to the system. Council will provide a reduction to the sewerage rates to reflect the cost of the power used for the operation of the system. The value of this is yet to be determined. The investigation report estimated this cost at \$50 per annum. This will be

CASE STUDY

Clarence Valley Council (CVC) provide urban services, including sewerage, to Grafton, Maclean, Yamba and the nearby towns.

CVC installed a low-pressure sewerage system in Lawrence in 2008. Following the successful operation, CVC constructed a similar system in Iluka in 2012. CVC has about 1400 properties connected to low pressure sewerage systems, with satisfactory record of performance and operational reliability.

CVC plans to have future subdivisions serviced by low pressure sewerage system, which will bring the number of properties serviced by these systems to more than 3,000.

recognised in Council's Fee's and Charges as a special offset for properties connected to the low pressure sewerage system. This discount rate is proposed to be in perpetuity.

The greatest advantage to homeowners is that the responsibility for the management and maintenance will transfer to Council. Homeowners with septic tanks are facing the risk of failure, and the need to replace components of the septic system over time. This is not required for a reticulated sewerage system.

Home owners will be responsible for managing the existing septic tank. This will not be required immediately and the timing will depend on the homeowner's needs. Generally, the homeowner will need to ensure that the septic tank is safe. Decommissioning it, if it interferes with any land use proposal will be at the landowners cost.

3 Environmental Issues

The proposed scheme will reduce the environmental impact of development in East Oberon and reduce ongoing ground and surface water influences

For the built environment, the scheme will have minimal impact. The pumping pit on each property is approximately 1m diameter, and will be sited in consultation with the homeowner, to minimise the impact. The pumps are quiet, and their location (typically around 2 m below ground) ensures that households are not affected by noise. Odours are prevented by using the existing house air vent. Numerous pumping pits have been installed in Australia in the last 10 years with minimal environmental concerns

The size of the sewerage system does not affect the performance or the impact on individual properties. The largest low pressure sewerage system was installed by South East Water Corporation in Melbourne, servicing some 16,000 properties in the Mornington Peninsula (Portsea, Sorrento, Blairgowrie, Rye and St Andrews Beach).

Construction activities will comprise laying small diameter pipes (up to 75 mm diameter) in shallow trenches of approximately 1 m depth. This is less intrusive than a gravity system where 150 mm diameter pipes are laid in trenches that may be as deep as 3 m.

At the completion of the construction, Council will restore the surface to its original condition. This will include rehabilitation of the ground and facilities (e.g. lawns, fences and driveways) if they are affected by the construction.

If Council resolves to proceed with this project, the next phase will be concept design and review of environmental factors (REF) report. These will be made available to the community.

4 Governance and Consultation

Oberon Council has not made a decision regarding the project. In order to make an informed decision

Council has commissioned the Options Report and is proceeding with the consultation.

The Councillors intend to make a decision on whether to proceed to the next stage in 2018. The decision will be based on a range of issues, including the outcomes of the community consultation.

It was made clear the majority of participants present in the meeting were not in favour of Council providing reticulated sewerage. Council will continue to liaise with the community, including providing the opportunity to submit written comments.

If a reticulated sewerage scheme goes ahead, it is expected that all homes in the catchment area will ultimately be required at some stage to connect to the system.

The State government is providing a grant of 50% of the cost of both East Oberon Sewerage and the upgrading of Oberon Sewage Treatment Plant. It is not expected that the funding to the treatment plant would be affected by whether East Oberon Sewerage goes ahead. Council is in the process of seeking additional funding for the balance of the project costs.

Council is considering this project as part of its commitment to improving the levels of service to all residents of Oberon, and to reduce the environmental impact of the existing and future development. In addition, the implementation of reticulated sewerage would open the East Oberon and Stratford Downs area to potential further development, subdivision of large blocks and/or construction of granny flats. Even if residents have no desire to subdivide, the potential for further development, and the availability of the service, are certain to increase the property value, to benefit of current home owners or for future generations.

5 Future development

Providing reticulated sewerage will provide for further development opportunities in the area. It is not expected that the area will be developed immediately, but Oberon needs to have available land to support growth.

This funding opportunity may never be repeated. If Council resolves not to proceed, it could mean that even minor development, such as granny flats, may not be possible for many years to come.

Comments were made on the benefits of opening the area for development, as the town needs to grow.

With respect to servicing new subdivisions in East Oberon, Stratford Downs and Flowerdale subdivision, opportunities exist to connect these areas, but discussions with the various developers have not included provision of reticulated sewerage. It was noted that the State Government funding is targeted specifically for improving the levels of service of existing development and cannot be used for growth areas. If the developers are interested in connection, discussions with the government will be required to facilitate the service without affecting the grant.

6 Summary of Outcomes of Options Report

The Options Report investigated a number of technologies including: conventional gravity sewerage system; modified gravity sewerage system; low pressure sewerage system; septic tank effluent pumping; and vacuum sewerage system.

The options were evaluated in terms of technical feasibility including operational complexity; capital costs; operation and maintenance costs; social impacts; environmental impacts; and ability to meet project objectives.

After the initial evaluation, conventional gravity and low pressure systems were shortlisted for a more detailed assessment.

The cost comparison of these options for capital investment and for net present value (NPV are given in the tables following. The table highlights the immediate costs estimated for the 2 preferred sewerage system options. (Information extract from the HH2O report).

| Option | Capital Cost Estimates | |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Total | Per property |
| Gravity | \$2,442,000 | \$48,840 |
| Low pressure | \$1,430,000 | \$28,600 |

| Option | NPV Cost | |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | Operation & Maintenance | Total |
| Gravity | \$221,000 | \$2,663,000 |
| Low pressure | \$166,000 | \$1,596,000 |

The advantages of the two systems have been detailed as follows.

Gravity System

- Council is familiar with operation and maintenance
- Similar level of service to existing Oberon residents
- Flexibility for future growth, as the system would have spare capacity by virtue of minimum infrastructure sizing
- Lower cost for future connections.

Low Pressure System

- Lower capital cost
- Increased flexibility on pipeline route and depth, minimal construction through private property
- Reduced pipe length, as lots on both side of the street can connect to a common main;
- Reduced potential for inflow and infiltration
- Ability to modulate flows based on operational needs of system.

In summary, the HH2O Report concludes two main recommendations that either a “ Low Pressure Sewer System” or a “Gravity Sewerage System” as the preferred options. Notably the Low pressure System is easier to adapt and construct and primarily has been considered more cost effective than a conventional gravity system for the study area, meeting the required project objectives. Irrespective of cost it is possible that the study area could be serviced by either option..

For more details about the project please contact
 Chris Schumacher, Works & Engineering Director,
 Phone 6329 8127, Chris.Schumacher@oberon.nsw.gov.au



OBERON EAST SEWERAGE RETICULATION PROPOSAL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Council has developed a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) information sheet which has been developed from questions raised at the public meeting relating to the proposed East Oberon sewerage reticulation proposal. This FAQ is provided to answer questions asked at the meeting and provide feedback to the genuine concerns raised by those residents impacted by this proposal.

| QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|
| Will Council pay all costs associated with the connection of a new sewerage system? | Yes – This proposal has been developed to be undertaken at no cost to the landowner for its implementation. |
| Will residents have to pay to remove their existing septic tanks? | Yes – but not straight away. Options are being considered to defer the need to decommission existing systems. |
| What will it cost residents to decommission septic tank and trenches? | The cost of decommissioning is site specific and cannot be estimated for individual properties at this stage. This will need to be facilitated by the landowner. |
| What will the annual rates be for landowners who connect to the new proposed system? | Oberon Councils fees are currently less than the NSW median for the average rateable sewer charge. This charge was \$615 in 2017/2018. |
| Will Oberon Council subsidise the cost of electricity to run these systems? | Yes - electricity will be fully subsidised through a sewer rate concession which will be determined each year through the development of Councils Operational Plan. |
| Concern is raised that the systems are unreliable? Will they last more than 12 months? | Evidence from this system in other areas does not support this ascertain. Case studies have been provided in Newsletter 2 providing information to the public. The pumps are designed to an approx. life cycle of 15 years before complete replacement being considered. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Who is making decisions on this project? | The final decision will be made by elected council after through community consultation. |
| How long will free electricity last for these pump sets? Will Council stop it after 12 months? | Council will provide an ongoing subsidised electricity component that will continue in perpetuity. |
| Will Council need to hire more people to maintain these systems? | It is proposed that current Council staff will be appropriately trained and will continue to maintain these systems under the current structure. Should a need for additional staff be required this will be a decision for the General Manager. |
| Is there a study on the Environmental issues of septic tanks in East Oberon? | Council has not looked at this in depth. The purpose of the proposal, whilst providing environmental benefits is an opportunity resulting from a State Government grant that Oberon Council are able to access. |
| Has Council considered using solar pumps to offset the electricity cost? | If systems are available that do not require mains power then Council will look at this during the design phase of the project. |
| Do Council have any ideas on a vote, will it be a percentage, 75% for or against? Do we get to nominate whether we want to or not? | The decision is made by the 9 elected Council representatives after ongoing community consultation. Councillors are keen to hear what the residents say. The elected Council have access to the same information as what has been presented. Any correspondence that people want to put in will also be included in the report to the council meeting. Any members of the community who know councillors are encouraged to talk to them. |
| If Council decides to go ahead will it be compulsory to connect? | At this stage it is proposed that all properties are connected. Options may be considered by Council to offset this requirement as part of the ongoing deliberation. |
| Will it be user pays system? | It will be expected (if approved by Council) that all residents will be rated for sewer. |
| Is the State Government funding subject to putting the sewerage in East Oberon? Can we get the funding wholly and solely to upgrade the STP? | It is not expected that the funding for the upgrade to the existing Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) will be affected by the decision regarding East Oberon. |

| | |
|--|---|
| What is Council's motivational incentive in offering this reticulated sewerage system? | It is environmentally driven and stems from the original grant application in 2008. The ability to continue to provide additional levels of service to the community are also a benefit. The final motivation is the grant funding that is currently available from the NSW State Government. |
| Has there been any other option looked at apart from the Low Pressure System? | An Options Report has investigated several options. Among the options the gravity system has been considered, estimated at \$2.6 million vs the low pressure sewerage system of \$1.5 million. The low pressure system is considered to be the most favourable cost option and for ease of construction and effectiveness |
| Is the tank and pump set noisy in the house and will it echo up through the pipes? | No – the systems are designed to operate at very low decibels and are fully contained underground which absorbs operational noise. |
| Will Council restore the original ground conditions so it comes back exactly as it is? | Yes – An Environmental Assessment will determine agreed restoration in consultation with individual landowners, should Council proceed. |
| What about odour. Storage tank will always have water in it and differing heights, is there any ventilation? | Yes – there is ventilation. The system will be connected to the existing house vent pipe upon construction. |
| Do the water rates go up with this system? | No – water and sewer rates are separate rating categories. |
| How far will the system be from the house? | It will be decided in consultation with the landholder. |
| Is it in our back or front yard? | It will be decided in consultation with the landholder |
| What would the requirements be should the system you currently have need to be relocated? Would Council pay for that relocation? | Costs associated with the construction and installation of the system will be at Councils cost and in consultation with the landowner. |