



# MINUTES

Seven Valleys Tourism Committee

held at

Council Administration Centre  
176 - Training Room  
180 Mort Street, Lithgow

on

Wednesday 18 June 2025

at 4:00 PM

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The Chairperson declared the meeting open at 4.00PM.

### **1. Acknowledgement of Country**

Lithgow City Council acknowledges Wiradjuri Elders past and present of the Wiradjuri nation – the original custodians of the land on which the Lithgow’s communities reside. The Council also extends our respects to our neighbouring nations.

### **2. Present**

Present: Mayor Cass Coleman, Clr Tom Evangelidis, Clr Eric Mahoney, Mandy Wiggins, Rachel Kay, Johanna Koleda, Andrew Chalk, Wendy Stephens, Trevor Evans, Mark Thomas

Officers: Shaun Elwood (Director People and Places), Simon Francis

Guest – Debbie Bryant (Glen Alice)

### **3. Apologies**

Ann Thompson, Graeme Pike

### **4. Declaration of Interest**

Nil

### **5. Confirmation of Minutes**

The minutes were presented and endorsed at the Council meeting of 26 May 2025.

**MOVED:** Johanna Koleda

**SECONDED:** Andrew Chalk

### **6. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes**

No matters arising from previous minutes.

## **7. Staff Reports**

### **7.1. Lithgow Mountainbike Transformation Project Update**

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#### **Transport and Access – Missing Link: Lithgow Station to Town and Trail**

Broad discussion occurred in relation to the MTB park also presenting a key opportunity to address the current transport gap between Lithgow Station and the town centre, as well as to the future mountain bike trail.

#### **Comments**

Recommend developing a clear itinerary or service proposal that can be shared with operators such as Fantastic Aussie Tours, aimed at providing seamless connections from the station to town and trail. Consideration should also be given to potential timetable changes by Sydney Trains in line with the development of the mountain bike facility.

A hybrid service model, similar to the one trialled at Blackheath, could be explored for Lithgow—offering flexibility and convenience for users being dropped near the track.

There is also scope for commercial integration into the track experience itself—such as a café, bike mechanic, or shuttle provider—ideally positioned as private operators supporting the trail’s ecosystem.

Engagement with Lithgow Buslines to assess the potential for route adjustments or additions is recommended.

Once DA approval is secured, the estimated timeframe for launch 12 months, allowing time to engage and coordinate with commercial partners and service providers.

#### **Workforce and Accommodation Considerations**

At present, there is no formal workforce or tourism accommodation strategy. However, there is optimism around the untapped potential in the local Airbnb market, which may provide the short-term capacity required. This could present a significant opportunity for the broader Blue Mountains region to benefit from increased visitor numbers and associated economic activity.

#### **ACTION / RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the Committee note the progress of the Lithgow Mountain Bike Transformation Project, and the advocacy needed by Committee members.

**MOVED:** Andrew Chalk

**SECONDED:** Mark Thomas

**CARRIED**

## **7.2. 7V Seven Valleys Branding Update**

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The Seven Valleys rebranding and marketing structure was discussed following the Destination Store presentation to Councillors earlier in June, including on the current status and future direction of the Seven Valleys branding campaign.

### **Key Discussion Points:**

- **Campaign Launch:** intent is to deliver the branding campaign to market by the end of this year. Efforts are underway to work with local businesses to incorporate the branding.
- **Funding Concerns:** No funds have currently been allocated by Council in 25/26 FY to bring the campaign to market, outside of the \$80K budget allocation for the development of a new Seven Valleys Website.
- Cr Evangelidis spoke about his upcoming Council Notice of Motion for a name change of Lithgow City Council to "Seven Valleys Council" .
- **Marketing Plan:** The proposed campaign includes:
  - Print media
  - Social media
  - Static advertising (e.g. billboards) in the Sydney market
- **Unfunded Elements:**
  - The LEEP program budget for 25/26 does not identify funding allocations for place or destination marketing.
  - There is interest in leveraging additional council budget to support the initial rebranded Seven Valleys marketing execution.
- **Budget Requirements:**
  - A minimum budget requirement of \$130,000 is identified in the marketing plan to provide for:
    - Creative development
    - Static media
    - Media buying
- **Additional Comments:**
  - Tourism budgets in other regions are significantly larger and emphasized the importance of investing in branding, as market perception is driven by brand presence.
  - Tourism already plays a role in the LGA, and for some communities (e.g., Rylstone), tourism is critical to economic sustainability.
  - Council assistance was requested to obtain foundational documentation for events like Wallerawang Fireworks, where volunteers are already engaged.
- **Strategic Outlook:**
  - **Place-based campaign**, not just a destination-focused one. Ideas like 7V bumper stickers and messaging for potential relocators are being considered.
  - The committee discussed the need for Council to reevaluate budget allocations to provide for initial market execution of the Seven valleys campaign.

### **ACTION / RECOMMENDATION**

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THAT

1. The Committee formally supports the proposed Seven Valleys (7V) marketing strategy and place branding concepts and recommends that Council adopt the implementation of the Seven Valleys (7V) place branding.
2. The Committee also notes that there is insufficient funding available in the 2025-2026 Council budget to roll out Year 1 of the execution of the branding to market.
3. The Committee notes the shortfall in funding for the Seven Valleys Tourism marketing campaign and asks Council to review it.

**MOVED:** Andrew Chalk

**SECONDED:** Rachael Kay

**CARRIED**

### **7.3. Capertee Valley Bird Festival - Wendy Stephens**

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The Capertee Valley Bird Festival celebrates one of Australia's richest bird habitats, home to over 230 species, including several endangered birds—most notably, the Regent Honeyeater. The festival is the product of a unique collaboration between community organisations in Glen Alice and Glen Davis, alongside BirdLife NSW, a branch of BirdLife Australia, whose strategic mission is to prevent bird extinctions.

This partnership regularly coordinates biannual volunteer planting events, forming the foundation of their conservation work and deep community connection. These are not-for-profit groups, united in their efforts to highlight Capertee Valley as a key destination for bird conservation awareness.

Council has identified an allocation of \$15,000 sponsorship for this event.

#### **Festival Audience and Goals**

The festival aims to build a sustainable future by targeting a well-educated, affluent, and time-rich demographic—including families, grandparents, and children and establishing the Capertee Valley as a key niche visitor destination within the Seven Valleys.

Although many festivals in Australia and the US have struggled, small businesses in the region continue to thrive. Capertee Valley hopes to mirror that success by offering high-value, conservation-focused event that appeal to serious birders, bushwalkers, caravanners, and the broader community.

#### **Logistics and Programming**

- Ticketing: 126 weekend tickets available for the ticketed program.
- Accommodation available in the Capertee Valley: 200 beds under a roof, plus 300 campsites
- Venues: Two halls with a combined capacity of 120 people
- Program: Over 900 minutes of activities, including bird walks, workshops, and cultural experiences
- Guided Walks: Conducted in groups of 15 on private properties, offering exclusive access beyond typical roadside birding
- Volunteers: 16 volunteers across 3 properties
- Community Engagement: Free family-friendly programs such as:
  - "Flight and Feathers" educational activities
  - "Magpie Walk" for children
  - Crafts and cultural sessions
  - Local environment talks

- Beginner birdwatching on Friday afternoon (free and aimed at locals)

These free components are vital in giving back to the local community and ensuring the event is inclusive and welcoming.

### **Sustainability Focus**

Sustainability is central to the festival's vision—covering:

- Customer experience: reusable water bottles, signage, compostable materials
- Operational sustainability: digital communication tools for navigation and information
- Environmental practices: waste separation, water management
- Financial sustainability: relying on ticket sales and volunteer support, not paid staff or built infrastructure

### **Vision for Growth**

While the festival currently uses existing facilities and relies entirely on volunteer labour, the long-term vision includes:

- Scaling through increased visitor numbers and spreading attendance across multiple days to reduce environmental impact
- Developing a local bird guiding industry to reduce reliance on fly-in guides
- Exploring funding avenues for equipment and infrastructure needed for guided walks and educational programs
- Testing and refining visitor experiences to ensure ongoing relevance and appeal

### **Challenges and Considerations**

- Promotion is limited to a Facebook page with minimal engagement so far
- Timing in September fills a gap between the region's peak visitation months (July and October)
- Questions remain around whether the community has enough to do, and how to balance volunteer expectations with public delivery

Debbie is currently developing a Volunteer Strategy, and discussions continue around clarifying expectations for what the free program delivers to the local community.

### **Conclusion**

The Capertee Valley Bird Festival is a grassroots, conservation-driven event with a clear mission: to promote bird conservation, support local communities, and foster eco-tourism in one of Australia's most important bird habitats. With strategic planning, community support, and sustainable growth, it aims to become a model for regional nature festivals both nationally and beyond.

### **ACTION / RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the committee note the presentation by Wendy Stephens about the Capertee Valley Bird Festival.

**MOVED:** Eric Mahoney

**SECONDED:** Andrew Chalk

**CARRIED**

### **7.4. Events Sponsorship EOI Program Update**

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The Expression of Interest (EOI) process has now closed. A total of 22 EOIs were received—an excellent response, with the majority coming from local events.

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The Events Working Party is currently assessing all submissions against a predefined set of criteria. This evaluation process is still ongoing and is expected to take several more weeks to complete.

Comments - A fantastic outcome—22 EOIs is a huge response

Council has allocated an initial \$45,000 to this program.

## **ACTION / RECOMMENDATION**

THAT The committee notes the update on the Event Sponsorship EOI program and the process of evaluation.

**MOVED:** Mark Thomas

**SECONDED:** Trevor Evans

**CARRIED**

## **7.5. Secret Creek Presentation - Trevor Evans**

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### **Conservation & Breeding Programs:**

Secret Creek is home to a successful endangered species breeding program, managed by the Australian Ecosystems Foundation (AESF), a not-for-profit organisation led by a volunteer committee of respected scientists. The sanctuary focuses on species that existed prior to European colonisation, such as Eastern Quolls and native reptiles—not the more commonly seen kangaroos or wombats.

### **Property Features & Expansion Plans:**

The property includes 6km of walking tracks within its secure perimeter, offering connectivity from the valley floor to the escarpment. These tracks also connect with the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GOS SCA). An old bike track exists on the site and is earmarked for future redevelopment. The sanctuary is unique in the Blue Mountains as the only location where native wildlife can be reliably seen.

### **Facilities & Venue:**

The original restaurant, formerly repurposed as a vegan wedding venue, is now a kiosk serving snacks and refreshments. The site also includes a Visitor Centre, currently being expanded to feature a new collection of turtles and reptiles.

### **Heritage & Management:**

Secret Creek is the work of Trevor, his family, and the One Mob community, who helped build the sanctuary's infrastructure. The AESF has been highly successful in securing grants and has ongoing collaborations with Emirates and other partners. The sanctuary has been operating since 1986, drawing species out of decline and bringing people closer to nature.

### **Visitor Experience & Tourism:**

Visitors frequently express amazement at the sanctuary's biodiversity and tranquility—often enjoying walks without encountering anyone else. The sanctuary experiences strong visitation during school holidays, with quieter periods in between. Warmer weather is expected to boost

general visitation. Current visitor data suggests that 70–80% of guests are coming from Bathurst, with notable influence from local MP Paul Toole’s promotions. However, there is low local visitation—an area to potentially improve through marketing.

**Collaboration Opportunities:**

There is strong interest from Blue Mountains Tourism in collaborating with Secret Creek, and a partnership with Zig Zag Railway would be mutually beneficial. However, Secret Creek brochures are currently not available at Zig Zag—an immediate opportunity to improve outreach.

**Discussion Points:**

- Who is currently handling marketing efforts? (Currently managed by Trevor)
- Consider implementing a short visitor survey to capture postcode data and better understand visitor demographics.

**ACTION / RECOMMENDATION**

THAT

1. The Committee note the presentation by Trevor Evans of Secret Creek Wildlife Sanctuary and any networking or advocacy opportunities for committee members or industry stakeholders.
2. That the next committee meeting be held at Secret Creek Sanctuary. Additionally, it is proposed that the meeting be extended to include a guided tour of the property prior to the session.

**MOVED:** Mayor Cass Coleman

**SECONDED:** Mark Thomas

**CARRIED**

**8. General Business**

General Business was not discussed due to time running out.

**9. Meeting Close**

Next Meeting: Secret Creek – Time and date to be confirmed.

There being no further business the Chairperson declared the meeting closed at 6.00pm