

Derwent Valley Council

Bushy Park War Memorial Pool – Community Meeting Report

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Purpose and Scope

This report has been prepared by Michael Stedman of Timmins Ray Public Relations in my capacity as independent facilitator of the community meeting held on 1 June 2026 at the Glenora District School Gymnasium, Bushy Park.

Timmins Ray is a member of the International Association for Public Participation, which sets the global benchmark for fair, transparent and inclusive public consultation.

My role as facilitator was to provide a neutral, structured environment for a direct conversation between Council and the community about the future of the Bushy Park War Memorial Swimming Pool.

This report does not make recommendations or findings, it records the themes and sentiments expressed by community members, notes the positions and acknowledgements made by Council and identifies a pathway forward for ongoing engagement.

Meeting Context

The Bushy Park War Memorial Swimming Pool was opened in 1954. It is a much-loved meeting place where generations of community members have come together, learnt to swim and honoured the memory of ex-service men and woman.

The pool was closed around three years ago during the construction of a new bridge over the Styx River.

As part of the bridge construction works, permanent crash barriers were built across the pool's access point, permanently restricting vehicle access.

Prior to its temporary closure, the ageing pool was facing major maintenance and compliance challenges, including the discharge of wastewater into the Styx River.

In late 2025 previous Council leadership made commitments to community members that the pool would be reopened.

Those commitments were not fulfilled and reopening has since been deemed unviable due to a combination of planning constraints, regulatory compliance issues, asset age and a lack of viable business case.

The 1 June meeting was convened to provide an honest account of those constraints and to open a conversation about what could be pursued at the site going forward.

Meeting Overview

The meeting was held on Monday 1 June 2026 at the Glenora District School Gymnasium, Bushy Park, from 5:30pm to 7:00pm.

Attendance included:

- Independent Facilitator: Michael Stedman, Timmins Ray Public Relations
- Council Officers: CEO Wes Young, Community Development Officer Ava Raku, Property Officer Jessie Browning
- Elected Members: Mayor Michelle Dracoulis, Cr Wayne Shoobridge, Cr Phillip Bingley
- Community Members: 56 attendees

The meeting followed a simple agenda: opening remarks from the CEO, a facilitated question and answer session with community speakers, and a discussion of next steps. The CEO bore the primary responsibility for responding to questions on behalf of council.

Areas of Acknowledgement by Council

The CEO made a number of clear and significant acknowledgements during the meeting.

- Council, through previous leadership, made commitments to the community that the pool would reopen. Those commitments should not have been made in the circumstances, and the CEO apologised for them.
- The regulatory, planning, and commercial constraints on reopening the pool were, in Council's assessment, insurmountable. There was no viable pathway to reopen the pool in its current form.
- Even without access and parking issues, the pool had exceeded its operational life at the time of closure (65 years against an industry benchmark of 50 years) and would have required substantial capital investment to refurbish or replace.
- The absence of a comprehensive asset management plan hampered Council's ability to track assets and maintenance obligations across the municipality.
- The trust relationship between Council and the Upper Derwent Valley community was damaged and would require sustained effort to rebuild.
- The war memorial site must be accessible to the community. The CEO confirmed direction had been given for the site to be open for Anzac Day and committed to progressing ongoing access arrangements.
- Council was open to discussing subsidised or free access to the New Norfolk pool for Upper Derwent Valley residents.

Community Sentiment

Virtually all in attendance were deeply unhappy about the loss of the pool and a clear majority either wanted the pool to reopen or for a new pool to be built at a different location.

Many were critical of a lack of foresight and proactive advocacy from Council in allowing the Department of State Growth to acquire the land in front of the pool during the construction of the new Styx River bridge.

There was a strong sentiment that Council investment had not been fairly distributed across the municipality and that the historical lack of pool maintenance and its ultimate closure was a symptom of this neglect.

Many felt that the Council had not fought hard enough to keep the pool, including questioning why a business case was not being developed for a replacement pool to attract state and/or Federal funding.

The following themes recurred consistently throughout the meeting:

Council accountability and decision making

There was sustained questioning about who was responsible for the series of decisions that led to the pool's closure. Speakers challenged Council on the lack of maintenance and investment in the pool, the apparent failure to anticipate the impact of State Growth road works on pool access, the adequacy of advice provided to elected members and the commitments made to under previous leadership to reopen the pool.

Some argued that elected members should be more accountable for the decision to close the pool and questioned why they were not responding to questions.

The CEO accepted responsibility on behalf of Council, apologised for the assurances given by previous leadership and acknowledged that the council had fallen short.

He explained that councillors made decisions based on officer advice and responsibility rested with the CEO if advice was inadequate or incorrect.

The importance of the war memorial

Concerns were raised about the loss of access to the war memorial. Speakers emphasised that the pool was constructed by veterans on land that was donated as a legacy for future generations.

Several speakers expressed concern that the war memorial site was locked and inaccessible to the public and to veterans.

A representative of the State RSL stated that the RSL's primary concern was the preservation and accessibility of the war memorial as a gathering place, a site of education and a place of reflection and that would remain the focus, regardless of what happened to the pool itself.

The CEO confirmed that he had directed staff to ensure the site was open for Anzac Day and committed to working towards ongoing public access for the purposes of remembrance.

State Growth bridge works

Multiple speakers questioned why Council had not done more to oppose, or appeal, the Department of State Growth's acquisition of land in front of the pool during the bridge construction. The CEO

explained that the acquisition was effectively compulsory (Council received approximately \$7,000 in compensation for 74 square metres of land) and that State Growth had indicated it was not open to moving the crash barriers that now blocked vehicle access to the pool.

Community members pressed Council to continue advocating at a state level to address broader infrastructure shortfalls in the Upper Derwent Valley including pedestrian access, footpaths, road safety and other unmet needs.

Equitable distribution of Council investment

A recurring concern was that Council had failed to invest in the Upper Derwent Valley relative to other parts of the municipality. The CEO acknowledged that the absence of an asset management plan until recently had hampered Council's ability to track and prioritise assets across the municipality. He committed to more proactive attention to the Upper Derwent Valley, citing the Commonwealth's Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program (RPPP) as an avenue to pursue funding for priority community projects. The CEO stated that this experience should serve as a turning point in how Council allocated resources and attention across the municipality.

Youth, safety and community infrastructure

Several speakers spoke of the importance of the pool for young people's health, wellbeing, and social connection in an isolated community with limited alternative recreation. Concern was also raised about safety without the pool, including that young people may swim in the river under the bridge.

The CEO indicated the Council had appetite to pursue new community infrastructure at either the pool site or on other Council-owned land, but that the specifics needed to be developed in conversation with the community.

Pathway Forward

The following reflects the outcomes of the meeting and the community's expressed interests for future actions and engagement.

What the community wanted

- Reopening the existing pool, potentially under community ownership and management.
- The possibility of a new pool at an alternative location, including consideration of whether school grounds or other sites could be made available.
- Preservation and interpretation of the war memorial and its history, independent of the fate of the pool itself.
- Broader infrastructure investment in the Bushy Park township, including footpaths, streetscape improvements and road safety improvements, including speed limit reductions.

What Council committed to

- A follow-up public meeting in the Upper Derwent Valley within three to four weeks, focused on what could be pursued at the pool site or on other Council-owned land, while exploring broader community priorities.

- Using the off-market proposals framework as a mechanism to explore proposals for community ownership of the pool.
- Approaching the Department of Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) about their willingness to provide land for a new pool (no commitment was given around the funding of new infrastructure).
- Continued advocacy with the Department of State Growth on road safety, pedestrian access, and other Upper Derwent Valley infrastructure concerns, including lower speed limits through Bushy Park.
- Ensuring the war memorial site was accessible to the community on an ongoing basis, not only on Anzac Day.
- Exploring subsidised or free access to the New Norfolk pool for Upper Derwent Valley residents.