

# Newstead Railway Arts Hub Strategy

## 2018-2020

23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018

---

### Background

The Newstead Railway Arts Hub (the 'Arts Hub') is based in the restored Newstead Railway station building.

The Hub has been created through the initiative of Newstead community members. It was identified as a priority in the Newstead Community Plan in 2013 and a submission put to the VicTrack Community Vacant Use (CVU) Program in 2014.

This submission was successful and with funding from the CVU Program the station was restored in 2015. The building is leased from VicTrack by Newstead 2021 Inc. and the Mt Alexander Shire is head lessee. The initial period of the sublease is five years from May 2015.

The Hub is run by a Committee of Management (CoM) that is responsible to and auspiced through Newstead 2021 Inc.

A start-up grant of \$5,000 was provided to Newstead 2021 from VicTrack in 2015. The day-to-day finances of the Hub are managed through separate sub-account of Newstead 2021. The operating balance remains healthy (\$6973.20 at 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

Over the last two years the Arts Hub achieved:

- 17 month-long exhibitions from Jan 2016 - Nov 2017 with over 2,500 visitors
- 2 successful funding applications:
  - \$1500 Volunteers grant to outfit kitchen and writer's retreat
  - \$3000 MASC community grant 'Wasteland to Wellspring' concept plan for landscape design
- 50 Friends of the Railway Arts Hub
- A website, Facebook page and Instagram with more than 600 followers/subscribers
- Run initial workshops in 2017, and developed a workshop program for 2018.

The Newstead Railway Arts Hub website has a comprehensive summary of activities that have been undertaken from 2014 to the present.

---

### Time for reflection

After two years of operation, the CoM decided that it was time to reflect, review and develop a draft Strategic Plan to guide the development of the Arts Hub over the next 3-5 years.

The draft Strategic Plan has been developed by the Arts Hub CoM through a series of meetings, facilitated by Chris Johnston which generated ideas about sustainability and future directions for the Arts Hub. A small working group was established to explore these ideas further and these have been shaped by the CoM in collaboration with Chris Johnston.

Next, the CoM plans to engage with the Newstead community and local and arts organisations to seek feedback and look for partnerships that will support and enhance these strategies, and bring new people into the organisation.

---

## Vision

### Existing

The purposes of NRAH are to enable the station to become a creative, economic and social focal point for the community through:

- art gallery and studio/office/workshop/space (for rent and workshop use) and kitchen/café area in main station building, studio space (for rent and workshop use) in the goods shed
- accommodation to provide for 'artist in residence' programs and other (income generating) accommodation options
- performance spaces (music, theatre, film, etc.) using the station platform, buildings and surrounding landscaped parkland
- identified start/finish point for local and regional walking tracks, cycling trails (including provision of local and regional arts, business and tourism information) and a link to the east side of township via a pedestrian bridge over the Loddon River
- provision of further venue options for existing large and small scale events, such as Newstead Live!, Words in Winter, Newstead Short Story Tattoo, Chopped Rod festival, etc.
- landscaped art/sculpture garden, incorporating local native species and sculpture for sale.

*[Source: NRAH website – developed for the original nomination to VicTrack]*

### Reflection

These purposes are strongly focused on the Arts Hub as a **place** and a **venue**. The CoM wants to expand its mission beyond 'venue' and is now seeking to:

- engage more strongly and deeply with the Newstead community
- link up with artists, art spaces and the broader arts community across the Shire and beyond
- activate the building with a more diverse range of arts activities
- make the Arts Hub more visible physically (e.g. through enlivening the grounds as well as the buildings) and programmatically
- be open to all aspects of the arts (visual, performative, written, oral etc) and arts practice (workshops, training/learning, practicing, exhibiting, reviewing) and all kinds of arts background (community to 'practicing artist').

### Reframed mission

*To be a creative hub where art, community and learning are celebrated*

---

## Strategies

Five strategies have been identified. Each is presented below, with the key actions to deliver each. A timeframe and resources need to be developed for all actions by the 2018 CoM – for example, each action could be indicated as Immediate, Next 12 months (2018-19), Next 2 years (by June 2020). The strategies could also be prioritised.

The Strategies are:

1. The Newstead Railway Arts Hub will become a key component in the arts offerings across our region.

2. The Arts Hub will present, promote and program the venue as a series of internal and external, purposed spaces
3. The Arts Hub will open its doors to the local community and actively encourage their involvement in its development and operation
4. The Arts Hub will build networks with arts organisation, venues and artists across the region
5. The Arts Hub will become a sustainable organisation that operates effectively and offers satisfying roles for CoM and other volunteers.

A key action identified by the current CoM to support the development and implementation of these strategies is to achieve a coordinator for the Arts Hub.

---

### **1. The Newstead Railway Arts Hub will become a key component in the arts offerings across our region.**

The Newstead Railway Arts Hub is seeking to define its role as part of a network of art-based venues and activity hubs across the Mount Alexander Shire and beyond. In the last three years, Newstead Railway Arts Hub has demonstrated that it can attract exhibition proposals from visual artists and makers from Newstead and surrounding districts. These exhibitions have been delivered to a professional standard and have attracted good audiences. Some exhibitors have re-booked the venue for the following year, indicating its suitability for their exhibition requirements. However, at times the venue has been empty, and while the CoM has sought to attract a wider range of uses (see Attachment 1) it has not yet fulfilled its vision of the Arts Hub as a hub for community arts activities, events and exhibitions.

Now the CoM is seeking to broaden its vision and is seeking to explore the potential role or roles of the Hub in the creative life of the region. In doing this, they are seeking to define the Arts Hub's distinctive qualities and the kind of offering that the Arts Hub can make. Importantly, they are seeking to find compatible and collaborative opportunities for the Arts Hub and to position it regionally, rather than locally, within a broader network of arts and creative spaces and communities.

To do this the CoM will:

1. **Explore the potential role or roles of the Hub by** mapping out what the Arts Hub offers in relation to the facilities and events offered by other arts organisations, looking outwards across the Shire and to the south and west to understand what others are offering, and how the Hub can play a distinctive role. This will involve:
  - **Consult with Mount Alexander Shire** arts officers and relevant Councillors (Cr Nieman, Cr Machin etc).
  - Consult with the **Regional Arts Victoria** about information and/or support to help the Arts Hub with this action.
2. Invite **ideas from the communities of Newstead** and nearby about what is needed to support the arts interests of these communities and to support local artists (including working closely with the Newstead Arts Salon Inc).
3. Based on the research undertaken, establish the Arts Hub's 'brand' and 'offer' and determine how best to promote it.

---

## 2. The Arts Hub will present, promote and program the venue as a series of internal and external, purposed spaces

The Arts Hub CoM has been considering whether it should designate some spaces for particular uses and activities. This may mean these spaces are no longer part of the exhibition space 'offer'. This would be a significant change, and while it would reduce the exhibition space it would enable fitting-out of other spaces to suit new, compatible uses.

To do this the CoM will:

- 4. Designate a primary use for each of the main spaces** inside the Arts Hub and determine the fit-out, furniture and equipment needed for each potential use. It will define any acceptable 'occasional uses' which would only be possible if the space is not booked for a primary use (so occasional uses could only be booked say a month in advance or less). As well as a 'spatial' approach to uses, there could be a 'time-based' approach (e.g. at weekends it a gallery – on weekdays it is a 'work space' etc).

As a starting point, the CoM has proposed:

Space/s	Primary use	Occasional use
Main room & 2 adjoining rooms	Exhibitions	Meetings (if no exhibitions)
Small room	Writers space	Hot desk for hire
Large end room	Workshops and classes	Music and performance Exhibition overflow space
External area/s	<i>(to be defined as part of the garden/grounds redesign: e.g. art exhibitions, community art market, music, performance)</i>	
The platform	Community dinners events, music, projections	Meetings Pop-up café during events
The goods shed	Arts activities that meet local needs and complement the Hub's 'offer': the Newstead Arts Salon is seeking the lease of this building with support from the Maldon and District Community Bank.	
The railway line	Shared path – walk, cycle	
The park opposite	Shared community space to complement external areas	

5. **Develop a name/brand for each space** that reflects and helps communicate the potential use/s of that space.
6. **Explore the potential uses for the Goods Shed**, working closely with the Newstead Arts Salon Inc. (NAS Inc) to define how the two facilities can accommodate compatible/complementary activities.
7. **Run a simple online survey** targeted to local artists, craftspeople, the school (etc.) to find out what spaces are needed and are not currently available in Newstead or nearby. This may refine the 'offer'. (Do this with NAS Inc).
8. **Identify the fit-out or facilities needed for particular uses.** Do this through an online survey that seeks ideas for a range of uses/local needs, and in other ways, (without promising that all ideas will be accommodated).
9. **Seek grants or other funding support** to purchase equipment, furniture or fit-out requirements.
10. **External landscape:** in designing external spaces, consider potential uses and activities that could occur outside the building but linked to the overall 'offer'. Consult with the land managers for the reserve to the east and the land around the goods shed. A concept design for the external space has been developed and approved (See Attachment 2) by the CoM<sup>1</sup>. It offers the following design intent ...

*This welcoming and beautiful garden will ease a transition into the Arts Hub and offer spaces for community celebration and quiet reflection. The design and plant selection honour the layers of history and link the garden to the Loddon River and the historic township of Newstead. Providing refuge and feeding the senses, the garden will nurture artists and the arts. Ever-evolving, wildlife friendly and resilient, it will be a joy for all.*

*The overall design has four distinct zones, lending itself to staging of construction as funding becomes available. These broad zones are: 1) Welcome entry and transition to an arts space; 2) Grassy swards and indigenous crops; 3) Community celebration and shady refuge; and 4) Fire circle and Ironbark stand.*

**11. Develop a promotions plan and an annual program for the Arts Hub** to include:

- Having identified the spaces and uses, work out a pricing strategy (e.g. have a differential 'local' price) and how to promote them to potential users.
- Monitor how users who book have found out about the Arts Hub.
- Establish an online booking form and an approval process for tentative bookings.
- Develop an annual program: this may include blocking out times for local uses linked to local events; plan for release of the program (once or twice a year or seasonally?).

---

### **3. The Arts Hub will open its doors to the local community and actively encourage their involvement in its development and operation**

The CoM wants stronger engagement by the communities of Newstead and surrounding settlements. The CoM believes that there are still local people who have not visited the Arts Hub and participated in an activity or event. The CoM has been keen to address this by expanding what the Arts Hub 'offers' but now feels that while this may help, it may not be enough.

At present the CoM is not sure if some locals feel excluded or that they don't see the Arts Hub as a place for them? The CoM sees local involvement as vital and will help ensure the Arts Hub is

---

<sup>1</sup> A. & C. Read, Emerging Landscapes, 16th November 2017

sustainable into the future. And while Strategies 1 and 4 involve outreach, the CoM recognises a continuing and strong local commitment to the Arts Hub is essential.

To do this the CoM will:

- 12. Focus first on the west side of town**, recognising most community facilities are on the east side of the river and exploring with those on the west side of town how the Arts Hub can meet their community needs. This should include discussions with the Railway Hotel proprietors.
- 13. Create some 'come and look' or 'come and try' activities** for locals only, to get locals through the door for the first time. Or hold some 'community only events' here, or attract some existing events to relocate here? Or invite locals to create an activity, performance here?
- 14. Re-establish a 'Friends of the Arts Hub'** as a way of connecting people to what you are doing, and encourage locals to be Friends. This could include:
  - Reviewing the current Friends list and making sure they are subscribed for blog posts OR having an email list for those who (for whatever reason) don't subscribe and letting them know about events
  - Having a Friends only event annually?
  - If the local Friends are the source of volunteers, working out how to engage them in taking up specific roles where they feel competent, and ensuring they know that their efforts are recognised and important (this needs a volunteer strategy?)

---

#### **4. The Arts Hub will build networks with arts organisations, venues and artists across the region**

The CoM recognises that it is not currently part of wider arts networks across the Shire or more broadly, and that building these networks will help position the Arts Hub within the regional, attract uses and users and build support for the 'brand' and 'offer'. An example is linking with other small towns: linking with Maldon as they don't have a space like the Arts Hub; linking to the Tiny Towns Art event; looking outside Mount Alexander Shire etc. This strategy is closely linked to Strategies 1 and 2.

To do this the CoM will:

- 15. Hold a workshop with arts organisations** from across the local area and the region to explore how the Arts Hub can link with others, share promotion, exchange ideas, offer a venue etc.
- 16. Define ways** to become and remain a part of key local and regional networks.

---

#### **5. The Arts Hub will become a sustainable organisation that operates effectively and offers satisfying roles for CoM and other volunteers.**

The current CoM has operated since 2015 with the following roles and responsibilities:

- Provide good governance in accordance with state and federal laws.
- Implement and review the Arts Hub Strategy.
- Encourage use of the facility to meet the intent and spirit of the nomination to VicTrack Community Vacant Use Program.
- Oversee the day to day operation of the Hub, including ensuring it is maintained in a safe and proper condition.

- Work with the community of Newstead and surrounds to encourage participation in the life of the Hub.
- Negotiate with Mount Alexander Shire (MAS) over matters concerning the conditions of the sublease.
- Operate the facility in a financially, environmentally and socially sustainable way.

It was resolved at the February 2018 CoM meeting to formalise a process to establish a new CoM for 2018.

### **Proposed Committee of Management structure and operation**

- At least seven (and up to a maximum of nine) members with a diversity of skills and capabilities, covering areas including the arts, business development, financial management, community development, marketing and promotion, sustainability.
- The appointed members would elect a chair, with other positions to be decided by the CoM.
- The Committee would be appointed for a period of 12 months.
- The Committee would have the capacity to co-opt members to the Committee as required.
- The Committee may establish subcommittees/working groups as required, and each may include general and co-opted CoM members as well as appointed people from across the community.
- The Committee will initially meet monthly but this may evolve over time as working groups are established.
- The Committee is guided by its Terms of Reference (adopted in 2017) and Working Together protocol. The decision-making processes for the CoM would be discussed and agreed at the first meeting using these documents as guidance.
- The CoM will report annually to Newstead 2021 Inc.

### **How will it be established?**

- Prospective committee members would make a formal, written application addressing a set of key questions.
- The CoM will be appointed by a panel of four local community members, including a retiring member of the current committee, a representative from each of N2021 and the Newstead Arts Salon and an independent member nominated by the current CoM.

---

## **Attachment 1: Use of the Newstead Railway Arts Hub over last 2 years**

### ***Current:***

CoM meetings  
RN meetings  
Art Exhibitions  
Workshops  
Starting point on local history tour  
Artists in residence (Sept/Nov 2017)  
Words in Winter (Aug 2017)

### ***Advertised uses:*** (Newstead Echo/[www.creativespaces.com/NRAH](http://www.creativespaces.com/NRAH) website)

Exhibitions (in 3 rooms)  
Meetings  
Workshops  
Artists' talks/demonstrations and workshops  
Use of the whole building for conferences

### ***Discussed/proposed uses:***

Newstead Art Salon evenings/events  
Concerts on platform  
Theatre venue  
Writer's retreat  
Corporate hiring of whole building  
Hot Desk in room without hanging rails  
Film Festivals  
Workshops (one off and a program)  
Artist in residence  
Residencies  
Festivals  
'Makers and Growers' market  
Pop up exhibitions



**Attachment 2: External space Concept design** – see <https://newsteadrailwayartshub.wordpress.com/useful-links/garden-concept/> for detail

