

# Down's Estate Community Project

## Fourth Annual Report

Covering period from

**1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**Association** A0097150A  
**ABN:** 61545960722  
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## **Committee of Management 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020**

John McKenzie	Co-chair	Pat Bentley	ordinary member
Robyn Erwin	Co-chair	Rodney Fedley	ordinary member
Maureen Griffin	Secretary	Gillian Collins	ordinary member, resigned 4/20
Andy Nelsson	Treasurer	Michael Sommer	ordinary member, resigned 5/20

The project is guided by a dedicated committee of local residents, supported by a diverse range of members, volunteers and other collaborators and supporters. This is centred around fortnightly committee meetings and weekly site working bees.

Our sincere thanks go to founding President of DECP, Maree Vinocuroff for her three years of service as Committee President. Maree stepped down from Committee at the November 2019 AGM. Her leadership and hard work helped guide us through the many challenges of our start-up phase into a more established and sustainable one, which is evident today. Her background experience and clear sightedness were greatly valued by all Committee members. We are very pleased Maree is still a member and volunteer at DECP.

## **Regular community and network engagements**

- Frankston Environment Friends Network meetings, monthly
- Seaford Farmers Market community stall, monthly
- University of Melbourne liaison committee, frequent meetings
- Frankston Council staff, frequent meetings
- Frankston Food Access Network, frequent meetings
- Frankston Community Garden network, periodic meetings

# Down's Estate Community Project

We present our 4th Annual Report for the Down's Estate Community Project.

Our aim as stated in the Association mission statement is to encourage sustainability through the care of the natural environment and strengthen community skills and attitudes. We undertake activities to acknowledge heritage, foster connection between people and their environment and develop organic food production.

The project operates on land owned by Frankston City Council under an annual licence agreement to DECP.

In the period between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 the world became a vastly different place due to the emergence of the COVID 19 virus. Many have argued that this virus emerged and transferred to humans due to increasing intrusion of human activity into natural spaces pushing other species into smaller places and in closer proximity to our own. This, together with the impacts of restrictions on mental health and connectedness, access to fresh food and the ongoing impacts of climate change, highlights the need for humans to explore alternative ways to source our needs, to reconsider our systems and our daily choices and the need for DECP to continue to work towards our mission. Although the restrictions we have all lived through due to the virus impacted our activities at Downs, we outline below the things we did do and the progress we made in working towards our mission statement and towards a stronger way of working together.

## **ACTIVITY AND EVENT HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Saturday Garden & Food Growing Working Bees,**

For the first two thirds of the reporting year, Saturday morning gardening bees continued with a regular group of volunteers weeding, planting, watering and harvesting together whilst enjoying a good chat. Talking continues over a friendly cuppa or shared lunch and we are grateful to Insun for taking on supplying interesting and tasty food on a regular basis. We're also rewarded with the harvest we take home.

We continue to learn from the site and responses needed to its challenges to be successful. Our 19-20 summer crops had a great start, but other creatures thought they looked pretty good too and feasted well when we were not there to see them. This highlighted our need for a rabbit proof fence so we installed make shift fences and began working towards a more permanent solution. Fortunately winter crops began successfully without seedling attack.

When the first Covid 19 lockdown came into place our regular working bees were cancelled but we were able to continue to care for the garden with minimal numbers attending at a time and maintaining social distance. It was an interesting time. The bike track became busier with many more people riding or walking past, with regular sport and activities cancelled. Many people wandered over to look at what we were doing and showed great interest in joining once we could again run our working bees.

### **Farmer Incubator Pop Up Garlic Farm Program**

Four members participated in the 2019 Pop Up Garlic Farm program run by the not-for-profit organisation Farmer Incubator. The four long beds of garlic ready for successful harvest added an impressive market garden look to the site. Participants attended workshops gaining skills and knowledge regarding various aspects of market gardening. In total around 2000 bulbs were harvested in November 2019, with many being sold to appreciative local buyers.

A second group had just come together to participate in the 2020 program but unfortunately the program was cancelled in March due to COVID 19. One of our regular gardeners took up our offer to proceed with growing a garlic crop with the support of past participants and the crop commenced fantastically.

### **Sustainable Indigenous Agriculture**

Our partners at The University of Melbourne were successful in obtaining a grant from the Helen McPherson Trust to establish an indigenous food garden at Downs and conduct research into the nutritional value of these and how they could be successfully introduced as a product for both individuals / families and the hospitality industry. The first planting of the initial 4 focus crops took place at our last AGM in November 2019. The warrigal greens were the fastest growing of the four and Downs members experimented with harvesting and retail presentation techniques. We thank Edithvale Community Grocer for participating and accepting our harvests for sale in their shop, inclusion in their box delivery and reporting positive customer feedback. We plan to further investigate and experiment to hone our techniques for a continuous healthy supply. Samples were also taken for nutritional analysis by the University.

### **2019 Annual General Meeting November 23**

Our AGM was held for the first time at Down's Estate with 21 people attending. The Annual Report was accepted and election of the new DECP Committee successful. Peta Murphy Federal Member for Dunkley, came with her assistant Madison and spoke to the group. We thanked her with the book "Reality Bites", a recent community food security photovoice project in which DECP participated and facilitated with other community groups.

### **Leap Year Breakfast and Super Moon Rising**

We celebrated Leap Year Day with a Community Breakfast on February 29, 2020 with volunteers and newcomers passing by, dropping in for a chat and a bite to eat.

On March 9, 2020, a small group gathered on the site to watch the rising of the supermoon (a full moon coinciding with the moon at its closest point to earth). This was a low-key event, with shared food, a fire, much talking and connecting and even a small singing performance. It was very much enjoyed and wonderful to experience the peace of the site in the evening.

Communal food sharing forms an important part of achieving DECP's community gathering and healthy eating goals. We plan to do both events again, even when it's an ordinary full moon or a non-leap year day.

## **SITE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Toilet**

The Clivus Multrum composting toilet, funded by FCC at around \$70,000, was installed on site in June/July 2019, after a very collaborative effort between FCC Officers and DECP members regarding features and location. It was officially opened by a founding member, Pat Bentley on November 23, 2019 at the AGM. She was the champion of this most necessary facility for the volunteers and visitors. DECP manages its maintenance and it is available when members are on site and locked otherwise. This is an excellent improvement to site infrastructure and been essential for the project to progress. We thank Councillor Bolam for instigating the funding for this and to the Council for approving it.

### **Masterplan Development and Infrastructure**

Frankston City Council's 2019/20 budget generously included \$350,000 for capital works at Downs Estate. Throughout 2019/20, the DECP committee worked with council officers and council's appointed architect to develop plans for these works. The main elements discussed included a verandah for the shed and improved ground works in and around this, solar power, installation of a 100,000 litre water tank, car park, pathways, disabled parking and a system for potable water. Completion of the plans and the actual works were moved to the 20/21 financial year.

Water engineers from the University of Melbourne developed a water plan incorporating a large tank, connected to the existing tanks and sited to allow drip irrigation to the garden areas. This plan was supplied to the architect as a basis for the final plans. We thank the engineers for their contribution.

### **Environmental Management**

Constructive talks were had with Council Officers regarding ongoing management of our licenced space including the sharing of mowing with Council employees to keep the site safe and tidy for volunteers and the public and to reduce snake presence in activity areas.

Following an invitation from Federal Member of Parliament Peta Murphy, DECP successfully applied for a Federal Government Community Environmental Program grant for the removal of four invasive weed species (box thorn, bridal creeper, kikuya and blackberries) and the delivery of community workshops regarding chemical free weed removal. Planning had begun for implementation of these works.

### **Pine Tree Removal**

In February 2020, FCC organised the assessment of most of the radiata pine trees on the site with the result that many were deemed unsafe and classified according to their risk. These trees were old and held intrinsic value in creating a visual and wind barrier to the east of the site along Old Wells Rd, provided homes and refuge to possums and other wildlife, food for black cockatoos and much character. We had witnessed cockatoos knocking down pine cones

from the trees then returning a few months later when the cones had dried and opened, to feast on the seeds. The committee consulted with FCC to retain as many of these trees as possible but were unsuccessful in preventing the felling of nearly all due to council's public risk concerns. The removal dramatically altered the feel of the site and has taken much time to get used to. We plan to revegetate the area to create a wildlife corridor in coming years.

## **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **Whole of Site Business Case Development**

Towards the end of 2019, the University of Melbourne was able to secure matching funding enabling realise of funds approved by Frankston Council to be used to prepare a business case to outline future activities at DECP. This would incorporate DECP values, activities, infrastructure, project costings and benefits for the community. Building on work through previous engagement with our university partners, the workload accelerated greatly in 2020 with regular meetings with our University partners and weekly, sometimes daily meetings and document writing by the DECP Committee working group.

Outside expertise was engaged to create social media infrastructure to support promotion, community engagement, communication strategies, and prepare for community consultations later in 2020, including consideration of the likelihood of Covid restrictions requiring much of this to be done online. The final submission to FCC is due later in 2020.

### **Farm House**

The conversation about the future of Harry Down's house has been a long and challenging one, starting at the inception of DECP, (initially known as DECPWG) in 2014. The local community recognises its historic value as a well-known landmark, clearly visible to all who visit the shared user path, and an important link to the farming heritage of Seaford. The house and shed are the only remaining buildings on what is the last remaining farm site in Seaford, with other structures demolished for public safety reasons. Despite the vandalism that has been perpetrated on this building over time, it is still a solid structure, as agreed in the FCC commissioned Building Surveyor's Report, that could be successfully renovated.

Consultations with community at the monthly Seaford Farmers Market over years have shown there is strong support to see it restored as a community asset, rather than demolished. Many submissions about its potential renovation and use have been submitted to Council Officers and Council by DECP for assessment and consideration over recent years, with obstacles relating to connecting services and cost causing it to be deemed an unviable project. Due to our commitment to seeing these challenges met and the house restored, Council asked us to prepare a list of potential community business, organisational and funding contributors and supporters which we did in October 2019.

In addition to that, we were asked to prepare a business case for retention of the Farm House at Down's Estate and this was submitted to Council on June 30, 2020. This document took into account all the issues of concern expressed by council Officers, as well as our renewed vision for it as a community gathering place, wet weather shelter, community resource centre and community Museum. It is closely linked to the overall site business case. This comprehensive

document was prepared with the valuable assistance of Fran Prem. Again, Pat Bentley's passion for this restoration drove and inspired the group to persevere. We especially thank all those people who gave us letters of support for this business case. We believe we are now at the most promising point we have been regarding the Farm House project and await Council review in August.

### **Next Steps for DECP Committee**

Completion of whole site DECP business case

Making best use of enhanced media platforms to engage with community for consultation and to increase interest and participation in Project.

Implement the CEP grant program which will seek an extension to June 2021 due to Covid negatively impacting our capacity rollout the program

Continuation of work with Council to complete site infrastructure works plan

### **SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND THANK YOUS**

A very big thank you to the community contributors on the ground every week and those who took Committee positions during the year. The workload was very substantial and the Business Case working group gave immense amounts of their personal time to get this important work underway in the most professional and productive way possible.

As our major active partner at DECP, we wish to again thank our colleagues from the University of Melbourne staff, Nicholas Thomson, Hollis Ashman, Colette Day, Dorin Gupta, and Evan Bittner for their expertise and genuine enthusiastic attitude, assisting us to move forward with implementing the Sustainable Agriculture Project (Helen McPherson Trust grant) and working with us on the whole site business case for DECP. We see this partnership as one with great potential that is now being realized through exchange of resources and learning with each other, academically and practically on the ground at Down's Estate. We acknowledge the sad loss of Hollis Ashman, a lead in the SIA project, who passed away in June 2020 and appreciate all the experience, insight and good humour she brought to our work.

Regina Orchard and Ash Marlow came on board to revitalise our existing communications and expand our social media presence and offerings. Special thanks to them for their expertise, flexibility and collaborative and creative mindsets.

Our long term community partners- Belvedere Community Centre and Seaford Community Committee continued their assistance to and hosting of our group at BCC and Seaford Farmers Market.

We thank all the Officers and Councillors at Frankston City Council who have worked with us during this year, including from Building and Facilities, Commercial Services, Community Strengthening and Natural Reserves teams. We have received valuable advice, had productive consultations and outcomes and continue to collaborate productively across a range of Departments and initiatives. Our main contact with Council is now through the Community Strengthening Department.

## **CONCLUSION**

Another very busy, challenging and rewarding year for the Down's Estate Community Project. We have continued to strengthen our connections with the local community, the University of Melbourne and other organisations. With the impact of Covid from March, we went online to continue our project work and fulfil our obligations. Like many other groups, we found our community connections broadened in some unexpected and beneficial ways even though we were unable to carry out some of the programs we had planned locally for 2020. This report year has brought insight and learning to our group and we are grateful to all those who have contributed to this progress, and particularly to the volunteers who kept the essential maintenance on site done during the lockdown. We look forward to being able to resume our weekly gardening bees and welcome new and old friends to back to Down's Estate.

### **Where Are We Now?**

At the time of writing this report in February 2021, our business case has been completed and approved by council. We feel we are at a launching point for the next stage of our project. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the University of Melbourne and identifying and forming new partnerships.

Most of all we are looking forward to increased engagement with the local community and are very pleased to already have several new people taking on a whole range of roles and contributing their thoughts, ideas and talents. Together we can create a unique and exciting community space!

DECP Committee

Prepared by Executive – John McKenzie, Robyn Erwin, Maureen Griffin, Andy Nelsson

February 27, 2021



# Finances For the period 1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020

## Down's Estate Community Project

Registered Association no. A0097150A

Australian Business Number 61545960722.

### Income Statement

#### Revenue

Grants (CEP, Weed management)	\$ 12,000
Donations, Bequests	0
Sales	0
Investment income	0
<b>total revenue</b>	<b>\$ 12,000</b>

#### Additional revenues

- The Uni of Melb has two accounts that support the Down's project.
  - DECP Business case. The uni supported the development of the Business case and contributed funds for the task. The account also held the \$25,000 that FCC contributed toward the Business Case.
  - the SIA project. The uni won a \$90,000 grant from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust for the SIA project. \$90,000 to be spent over two years and across a number of sites including at the Down's.
- FCC. In the 2019/20 financial year Council built the composting toilet at Downs at a cost of around \$70,000. Additionally a further \$350,000 was allocated for site infrastructure development. These significant amounts offered a huge boost toward the progress of the project.

### Expenses

#### Project Implementation

Employment contracts for Business case	\$ 2950
Site maintenance, materials, toilet hire	\$ 3256
Site lease fees to FCC	\$ 335
<b>total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 6,541</b>

**excess of revenue over expenses**      **\$ 5,549**

### Balance Sheet

#### Current Assets at 30 June 2020

cash at bank	\$10,470
assets: tools, materials, equipment	1,000
reimbursements to be received from the Uni accounts	2,950
<b>total value of DECP</b>	<b>\$14,420</b>

#### Current liabilities:

Project to be completed; CEP Weed Management	\$ 12,000
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**Net Assets** (uncommitted funds available for use)      **\$ 2,420**

**Total Equity**      **\$ 2,420**

### Cash Flow Statement

cash receipts in course of operations	\$ 12,000
cash payments in course of operations	\$ 6,541
bank interest received	\$ 0
bank balance at the beginning of the period	\$ 5,011
bank balance at the end of the report period	\$ 10,470

### Committee Declaration

The Committee declares this financial statement gives a true and fair view of the financial position of the association as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and its performance since commencement of the reporting period on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019.

Co-Chair John McKenzie, 24/2/21      Treasurer, Andy Nelsson 24/2/21

