

New community centre for former church

by Alethea Morison

Willoughby City Council has purchased the former church on the corner of Artarmon and Tindale Rds, Artarmon, for \$2.1 million. The purchase of the property is being funded from Council's Property Plan Reserve.

The premises include the church building and hall, originally constructed in the 1920s. The property has already been renovated to a high standard for a range of performance and workshop uses following its purchase by the Gavemer Foundation in 2002. The renovation added amenities such as disabled toilets, shower and kitchen while preserving heritage features.

The purchase of this building allows for the relocation of the existing library into the former church at the front of the premises. Council is preparing a development application for re-fit of the building and seeking community input, particularly on desired uses for the attached hall. Potential uses suggested at the meeting include community group meetings; activities complementary to the library such as reading and film groups; yoga and other classes and possibly some forms of parties and ceremonies.

A recent meeting involving Council officers, neighbours and residents, APA and

Sustainability Street members and ward councillors raised several concerns with changing and increasing use of the property. Neighbours emphasised the need to manage the type of activities, days and hours of operation, the numbers of people permitted on the site and traffic and parking in the surrounding area to minimise noise and disturbance. The need for measures to improve acoustics and limit noise from travelling off-site were also discussed.

The meeting also expressed concern that relocating the library away from the station and across busy Artarmon Rd would impact adversely on library patronage and the safety of library visitors. Library patronage has been increasing, with commuters going to and from the station and children swelling the numbers. To ensure everyone, including school children, can continue to use it independently, safe and convenient access from the station will need to be addressed.

Council's has promised full community consultation on the new project. As well as input on potential uses and issues of concern, Council will invite further community involvement in project events and activities, such as the naming and launch of the new facility. Council will seek input through future community meetings and 'Bang the Table' (see box). Council's

commitment to sustainability will also be incorporated in the refit of the premises. Concurrent with the consultation process, Council will submit a development application for use of the property as a community facility and library. Following notification of the DA, the application will be assessed by an independent, external town planning consultant and determined by Council.

Further information about the outcome of both the DA and community consultation processes will be provided in the August Gazette.

For input or thoughts about the use of the building going forward, visit www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au, and click on the 'Artarmon Library & Community Centre' link under the 'Bang the Table' area of the homepage to have your say. This online forum will be operational until at least the end of May. The online discussion forum site is independently moderated by Bang the Table.