

Following our presentation in November last year a decision was made by Councillors to rebuild PICAL into a purpose built Community/Neighbourhood House, a decision that was met with much delight and gratitude by the many volunteers who work at PICAL as well as tutors, service users and outside agencies that use our current facilities. We are now given to understand that there has been a suggestion that we move into a redeveloped Cultural Centre now that PINP have pulled out, however, our needs remain the same and we respectfully request that our redevelopment goes ahead as previously discussed.

At a recent meeting at Bass Coast Health I was disappointed, saddened and aggrieved when somebody described us as the “derelict buildings between the Phillip Island Health Hub and Cultural Centre”. I was quick to point out that after operating out of the same buildings for 35 years we are certainly looking tired but are very much a vibrant Centre, providing 180 contact hours a week as well as 800 distributions of food annually from our PICAL Pantry and acting as a base for visiting services and community based groups. We continue to auspice U3A as well as some regular groups which help us to maintain connectivity with the local community.

Over the last year we have attracted 3 new members on to our Committee of Management and everyone on the Committee has been working closely with Sue Pascoe-Johnson (Program Manager-Cowes Revitalisation) and Chris Wightman (Co-ordinator Strategic and Community Planning) to get some concept plans drawn up. Following discussions with Sue we are currently looking at a building size of about 400 square metres, with the possibility of expansion in the future. We are committed to building an eco-sustainable building so not only have we looked at buildings designed by EcoLiv, we have joined forces with Energy Innovation Cooperative who have offered to provide products in our new building, e.g. Solar panels, water tanks etc. and set up our Centre as an eco-friendly and self-sustainable environment. We plan to establish a sub-committee that will work on a relocation plan as well as investigate funding/grant options.

Further to our planning meetings, we realise that we would be better situated at the Northern end of our current site which would give us closer proximity to our Community Garden, which continues to thrive. There has also been some discussion about the Coels Shed being relocated to the PICAL Community Garden, where it will be refurbished and connected to power and water so that it can enjoy a new life as a gardeners’ shed and coffee break area as well as providing an area for the local school children to have their lunch when they visit the garden.

Relocation to the proposed redeveloped Cultural Centre sharing spaces could make it difficult for us to ensure we have enough rooms available for the classes/services we currently provide without disenfranchising other potential community users. A separate, dedicated building for PICAL will not only ensure we can continue to provide what we do but give us the opportunity to grow services and have more space available for use by other community groups. There is no doubt in our mind that PICAL being in their own, purpose built building will be an asset to the community and enhance the area between the Cultural Centre and Phillip Island Health Hub and no longer look like derelict buildings.

Our close links with the community continue (see PICAL Network Snapshot document) as well as the need for permanent, flexible classrooms, delivery and storage area for foods for the PICAL Pantry, a distribution point for same with enough room for 3 fridges/freezers, discrete area for Centrelink, room for U3A to incorporate a rehearsal space and a piano,

LOTS of storage for groups such as Boomerang Bags and Stitch and Bitch as well as table tennis tables and equipment. We do not want to be lost in a large area and would prefer a home base which would also provide a comfortable space with a drop in capacity.

Our vision of a purpose built 'clean energy' neighbourhood house servicing the many groups that meet at the centre would streamline service delivery and cater for the diverse nature of activities offered. It would also showcase the benefits of transitioning to renewable energy and its positive impact on the environment - making a statement that we care about the island and future generations.