

C4CE Community Energy Congress

The Renewable Newstead Story

Geoff Park



March 6, 2024

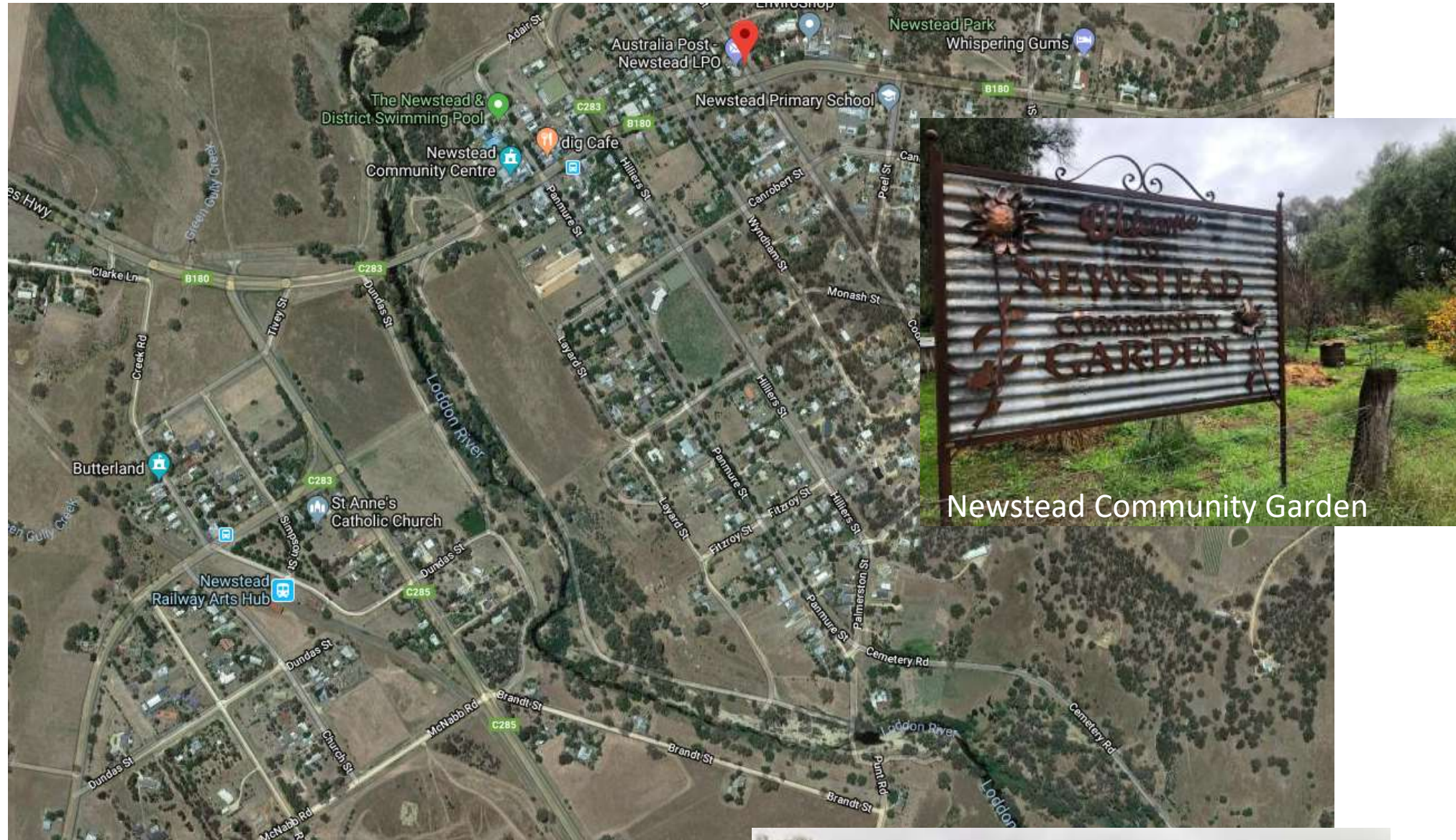




Newstead Energy project ... Dja Dja Wurrung country between Castlemaine and Maryborough in central Victoria

January 2024

How our community operates ...



Newstead Community Garden



Newstead Swimming Pool



Newstead Arts Hub

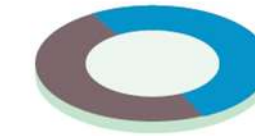
Newstead at a glance

754 LOCAL RESIDENTS



54-65 year olds

Largest age group
(30-34 year olds Vic's largest)



50.3%

People aged 15+ reported being in the labour force full time (57% in Vic)



11%

People working from home (Vic 4.6%)



50.5%

people who attended post secondary education (37.9% Vic average)

4%

People working in sheep farming (Vic 0.2%)



Source: Census 2016, Quick Stats

364 PRIVATE DWELLINGS

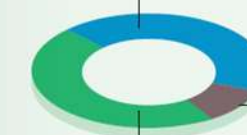
43.9%

Dwellings owned outright (32.3% Vic average)



17%

Internet not accessed from dwelling (13.6% in Vic)



13.2%

Rented (28.7% Vic average)

\$863

Median weekly household income

39.8%

Dwellings owned with a mortgage (35.3% Vic average)



32%

Households earning less than \$650 (gross) a week

The catalyst ...

Project principles

1. Be 100% renewable
2. Be opt-in
3. Be grid connected
4. Deliver community benefits
5. Do no harm

A Summit to Remember

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had a big meeting in Canberra in April to discuss the nation's future. Newstead gathered on May 4 at the Community Centre to discuss our town's future and the big issues for our community.

What began as a mad idea a few weeks before took shape, as an informal committee organised our "summit".

Officially 123 people turned out for Newstead 2021. That's 15 per cent of our local community! We suspect a few more attended but didn't sign in.

Setting the Scene

Patrick Kavanagh opened proceedings, welcoming participants to share their ideas about how Newstead could build on its strengths and meet the challenges of 2021.

In an interview, **Maureen Heagney** from Sandon talked of her lifelong involvement in community affairs. Maureen explained how the CFA Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1980 after fires threatened Newstead the year before and how funds were raised to build and run the pool. She talked about the auxiliary's struggles to gain new members and how members raise money by running dances and catering for funerals.



L-R: Andrew Shirres, Georgina Duckett, Geoff Park, Saide Gray, Katy Smith, Genevieve Barlow, Patrick Kavanagh

- Trouble magazine proprietor and arts advocate **Steve Proposh**
- Newstead Primary School reps **Maddie Ruggles, Zac Carson, Alice Reece & Sam Daldy**



L to R: Sam Daldy, Alice Reece, Maddie Ruggles, Zac Carson

Our Big Ideas

Geoff Park called for ideas from the floor. (See back page.) There was no shortage of them: street trees that could feed people, a system of safer, integrated walking and bike paths, more play facilities for kids, a community garden, a cultural centre, a ride-share program, solar energy, natural gas connection and so on. Then we broke into groups to talk more. (See middle pages.)

This special insert outlines the main themes that emerged from the summit.

We've created this so everyone, including those who couldn't be at the summit, can reflect on the ideas and think about where Newstead might progress from here. Enjoy!

The informal committee: Geoff Park, Katy Smith, Georgina Duckett, Saide Gray, Andrew Shirres, Ron Sney, Patrick Kavanagh, Genevieve Barlow, Don Guvener, Bosa Olajisick & Jerry Dyer.

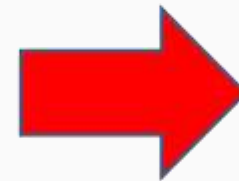


Maureen Heagney and Paul Righetti


Local Views of Newstead

Community members shared their perspectives about what makes our Newstead community special:

- Policeman **Grant MacDonald**
- Yandoit farmer **Paul Righetti**
- **Cheryl Gervasoni**, Newstead IGA supermarket
- Youth and sports advocate **Kylie Richardson**
- Newstead Landcare representative **Jennie Grundy**
- Newstead CFA member **Chris Simmins**



Newstead Community Plan 2013



Town of
NEWSTEAD
Parish of Stragways
COUNTY OF FALGOUT

OUR PRIORITIES

At this stage the plan suggests a set of major projects:

1. Refurbishing and revitalising the Newstead Station as an arts precinct
2. Creating a pedestrian bridge across the Loddon River to connect both sides of town
3. Establishing a skate and bike park and community activity centre
4. Establishing a connected network of walking and bike paths and trails between Newstead and surrounding towns, using existing easements and bushland areas
5. A major renewal of street trees within the town precinct
6. Establishing a "Support and Sustain our Volunteers" initiative for volunteers and community groups



local business strategy for Newstead to build business and opportunities

liveable Newstead, to ensure Newstead retains its unique rural values into the future

our ageing population through access and accommodation

focus to minimise traffic impacts and create a safe and



HOW IT BEGAN

Our path to beginning

2004 A seed is planted

The desire to address Newstead's future energy needs and costs was first identified at a community survey in 2004.

The community saw this as an opportunity for positive and potentially rewarding change and to build resilience in the context of a changing climate and a rapidly changing energy industry.

2005 A group is formed

Renewable Newstead (RN), was formally established in a group in 2005 to pursue future energy options for the town. That year RN worked with Central Victoria Solar City (CVSC) on a project focused on energy audits and technical change. 500 low maintenance on-roof water systems and on smart meters.

Residents were encouraged to undertake household energy assessments to understand how they were using energy and to give them options they could adopt to reduce home energy use. More than 700 households and eight businesses took part. Renewed then had over 300 houses.

Also in 2005, the town's first solar panels were installed on a roof-top solar panel system run by the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group.

2006 Community reiterates need for an energy project

Secure, locally generated renewable energy was further reinforced as a goal by Newstead's Community Plan. At this meeting public support for the project, it would emerge renewable energy residents and local businesses.

2006 Direction is set

By 2006, RN had clear objectives and a goal. We needed to develop a document and implement a plan for switching our small town to 100 per cent locally generated, renewable energy in a community that is not that used to large-scale projects in the community.

We needed to identify and break down the barriers, so that small towns like ours everywhere could do the same. We also found industry and regulatory barriers. RN will continue to work on a range of alternative goals for our community, we have Renewed made a plan for the town. We began lobbying politicians for funds for this research.

2006 Vic Govt backs project

In February 2006, the newly appointed Victorian Minister for Energy, Liz Dahlen, announced the Victorian Government would spend our project.

2006 Grant agreement signed

In May 2006, RN signed a grant agreement with the Victorian Government to provide a master plan to transition Newstead to 100 per cent.

2007 A study offers hope

A feasibility study undertaken in 2007 showed residents of Newstead could only go on for 10 years before the following methods of generating that energy: government, solar, wind, biomass, afforestation or windfall responding, water gains, behind-the-meter solutions.

The report identified three important factors:

1. Government, in energy that produces no greenhouse gas emissions, solar, wind, biomass, afforestation, windfall responding, water gains, behind-the-meter solutions.
2. Renewable energy from biomass, afforestation, windfall responding, water gains, behind-the-meter solutions.
3. Renewable energy from biomass, afforestation, windfall responding, water gains, behind-the-meter solutions.

Importantly the report also:

Small town big switch

Newstead's journey to renewable energy

"Putting it simply, it is difficult to believe that the grid could be without a substantial contribution from a generation station (renewable energy) in the short-term. The local residents chose their power from this source (in the form of Government) to a benefit it retained in the financial carbon accounting world."

RENEWABLE NEWSTEAD REPORT 2007

The journey so far ...

2011 - RN formed and partnered with Central Vic. Solar City

- Home energy assessments (80% of households)
- Community survey
- Feasibility study funded by Sustainability Victoria (\$20K)

2015 – State Government support to design ‘the model’ (\$200K)

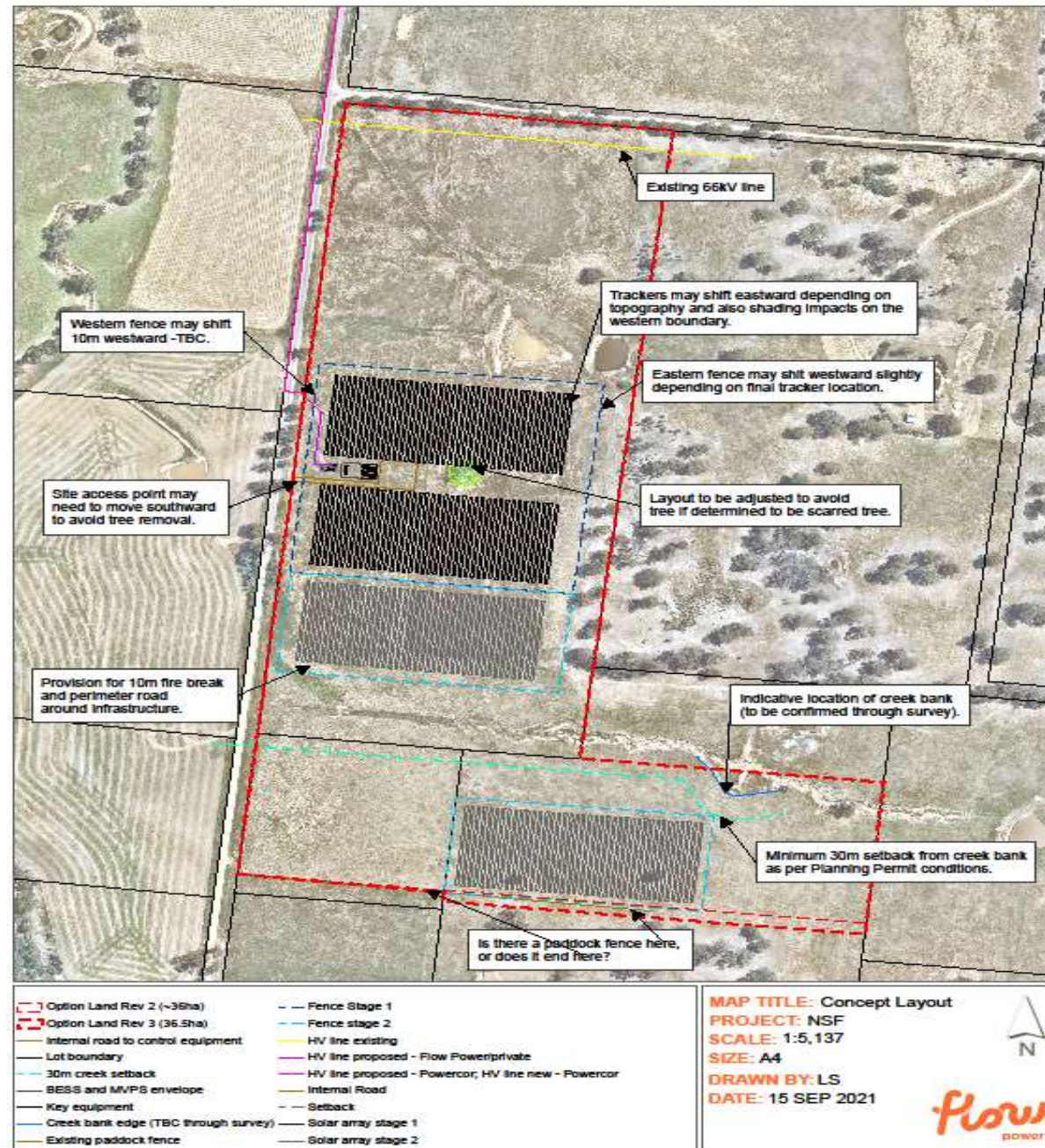
- Master plan for transition to 100% renewable energy
- Detailed assessment of technical, regulatory and financial requirements
- Develop the ‘Business Case’
- ‘Small town big switch’ report

2019 – State Government backing to implement ‘the model’ (\$1M)

- Local solar farm emerges as the most sensible and viable option
- The hard work begins ...



So 'we' decide to build a solar farm ...



1. Identify and secure a site ★★ ★
2. Planning approval ★★ ★
3. Form a partnership to construct, finance and operate ★★ ★
4. Develop a retail offer ★★
5. Build and connect the farm to grid ★★
6. Engage with our community at key steps along the way ★★



Farms facts ...

- 6.2 ha site
- 3MW (4,320 panels) – tracking
- 5MWh battery
- Construction began Nov 2023 ... on track for completion and grid connection in May 2024



Renewable
Newstead

Partnership with Flow Power

Flow Power - own and operate the farm and retail the electricity it generates

- Matching community expectations and commercial realities has been, at times, challenging

Observations on the partnership

- FP responded to nation-wide tender call & have a background in selling to commercial & manufacturing sector – young energetic business
- Mutual respect and trust has been fundamental ... every interaction over 3 years has been professional, open and respectful
- \$1M of State Government funding = 15% of the project cost
- Flow Power have genuinely sought to understand our community, invest in relationship building and support the overall ambition ... they 'get it'!



Why not community ownership? ... happy to discuss in Q & A

Flow Power Retail Offer

- **Available late March 2024 ... 100% green electricity based on a legislated definition**
- **Currently being trialled by small group of residents**
 - **173 local EOs**
- **Affordability**
 - **6.11% below the 'black' VDO**
 - **15.71% below the equivalent of a 'green' VDO**
- **Features**
 - **Price Efficiency Adjustment (PEA) – demand management**
 - **'Tech' – kWach Mini**
 - **Annual Grants Program**



Victorian Government support

- **Significant, enduring and given with trust**
- **Commitment and vision by our local member (Maree Edwards) and Energy Minister (Lily D'Ambrosio)**
- **Project support from DEECA staff has been phenomenal**

... it has felt like a true collaboration



Our core team

We volunteer skills, time and expertise in project and event management, graphic design, computer and IT skills, negotiation & stakeholder management.



Geoff Park

Geoff Park is a local independent ecologist and writer and actively works with our local community on initiatives that generate positive social, environmental and economic benefits. At present he contributes as part of the Renewable Newstead team acting as the convenor.



Gen Barlow

Genevieve Barlow is a freelance journalist and writer with a strong background in agricultural and rural affairs journalism. Since the Renewable Newstead project inception, Gen has co-ordinated and executed the community engagement schedule and partner reporting.



Don Culvenor

Don Culvenor has a lifetime experience in local farming, community volunteerism and business. Don brings planning and policy experience to the Renewable Newstead team as well as being across the technical aspects of the project including the Powercor tariff trial.



Mike Reeves

Mike Reeves has lived with grid-connected solar since 2007. He worked in energy efficiency and solar promotion from 2009-2015. A regular visitor to Newstead, and volunteer tragic, he has served on a hall committee, a progress association and was a CFA brigade member for 15 years.



Shaun Britt

Shaun Britt moved to Newstead in 2013 with his family of 4 kids. Shaun currently works across areas of reliability and control in a Managerial role. His interest in the Renewable Newstead project is around providing a sustainable environment for his kids in a way that is less cost for all.



Jane Lean

Jane Lean moved to Newstead in 2020. She has a background in general management and public policy as well as a decade of volunteer experience in the development of community renewable energy and not-for-profit community associations. Jane is committed to climate change mitigation and adaption, at individual and local levels, while recognising the importance of national and international initiatives.

Working together as a volunteer group we ...

- Respect each other
- Bring different knowledge and skills to the table
- Recognise that a variety of skills are needed in a project – technical, social, administrative
- Are acutely aware of the importance of ‘social licence’



February 21st 2024