



## HOME AND GARDEN

# Building a better Bowral

### The revision of the Aussie dream set to shake Bowral

**Architect Martin O'Toole takes a walk through Bowral with Southern Highland News journalist Joshua Grech in search of Bowral's future streetscape.**

The great Australian dream has been under revision over the last few years as many people opt not to have a backyard in the 'burbs'.

As the lawnmower is retired to make more time for café life the townscape has become more of a backyard for Aussie dream revisionists.

Highlands architect, Martin O'Toole sought to find why many have opted to make the main street their backyard as well as how Bowral's townscape can be made more appealing for residents and tourists alike.

"We are living in a special time in Highlands development because it is at critical mass, there is really nowhere else to go," Mr O'Toole said.

"Council's stance to promote infill development is a great thing for the Highlands, but it has to be managed well.

"At the moment with more and more people moving into the area and less and less room for these people to be catered for, town planners can successfully select buildings that are basically ugly and remove them replacing them with far better developments."

Mr O'Toole pointed to some developments that have already taken place in Bowral which have successfully brought new life to the townscape.

"I give full marks to the Royal Hotel because it is a refreshing welcome to the northern entrance to the township," he explained.

The critical design feature that Mr O'Toole pointed to that brings the townscape together, as well as making it beautiful, is the inclusion of through planning.

"The laneway connecting the Empire cinema to the main street is a great example of thorough planning where people are quite comfortable parking off the main street and walking.

"There are a number of spots that



Martin O'Toole says northern development of Bowral town centre could take better advantage of Bowral Memorial Park.

**Suggested regulations to make medium density successful:**

- Town planners must judge developments on subjective criteria rather than a formula to avoid ugly buildings.
- Regulations that allow for the individuality of different buildings, yet provide a common theme must be initiated.
- There is never too much planning. Most good plans come long after the planners are dead and buried.
- Plans must not be made on the basis of property value, too much of present planning is based on the fear that property values may be lowered. This is generally untrue and is ultimately a selfish aim.

could be developed like this so that shops and residential areas are well connected.

"Ultimately people don't like walk-

ing up and down one street, they prefer moving in circles so that they are not repeating over themselves."

The greater dilemma that faces prospective residents as well as Council is the residential areas, or lack of traditional residential areas, available in the Highlands. "It's simple arithmetic that the Highlands must develop its medium density belt," Mr O'Toole continued.

"Council has rezoned a lot of area to the east of the town centre around Shepherd Street but that hasn't really come available to developers.

"The success of Corbett Manor on Short Street is a great indication that more and more people are opting to live in smaller well designed spaces.

"What I see as an excellent move for the streetscape of the town centre and as a measure to limit the cutting up of the surrounding country is the promotion of mixed density right here in the middle of town. "Apartments in the main street add to the streetscape, the nightlife and social dynamic of town, while limiting growth on the suburban periphery of town."

However, Mr O'Toole warned that mixed medium density developments had to be treated with the upmost care when it came to planning.

"These developments are large and it's hard to pull them down if they look awful unlike a stand alone house.

"If there are strict rules that govern the develop and Council has the guts to quash ugly developments then medium density developments can only add to the streetscape."

Mr O'Toole urged Council to be more subjective about what they approve as far as developments are concerned.

"All too often buildings are approved due to fulfilling criteria rather than how they interact with the rest of the street, that's why medium density housing has been given a bit of a stigma by many. "But it doesn't have to be that way if good planning prevails."

Such planning may lead to the Highlands streetscape living up to the expectations of its marketing, an expectation that is not at the moment reflected in planning of the Bowral town centre.

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## Who did it? Who was born? Who got married? Who was honoured?

The heartbeat of any community comes from its network of volunteer organisations. Its soul comes from the residents - lives rich and diverse. The Southern Highlands is a region steeped in community spirit. There are more than 400 volunteer groups devoting their time and effort to building a better place for all of us to live.

The Southern Highland News has always been an avid supporter of all community group activities. Community News, is a section dedicated to highlighting the activities and achievements of all groups. It appears in every edition of Southern Highland News. Community News also covers those special moments in

the lives of Southern Highlands residents - the births, the marriages, the honours and their dreams. We believe this bright, informative section is something special, bringing the whole community closer together.

Where should you turn to every Monday, Wednesday and Friday?

## Focus