

Our community, our future

# MEANDER COMMONS



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# Meander Commons: A Vision for the Future Use of the Meander Primary School Site

Meander Area Residents and Ratepayers Association Incorporated (MARRA) believes in a future for the Meander Primary School site that is based on timely, transparent consultation with the Meander community and residents of nearby Tasmanian towns interested in using the site. Formulated as a new beginning for the site, our vision for the site presents a philosophy and a proposal that sees a well-loved community school site remaining in the hands of its local community and continuing to contribute to that community.

## Our Aim

To ensure the community of the Meander area has continuing use of the former Meander Primary School buildings and adjoining land.

## The School's History

Schooling started in the Meander area in 1891, before the town of Meander was gazetted in 1907. During the 1930s and 1940s the regional importance of the school increased as nearby schools closed, with school buildings (and some students) from Montana, Golden Valley and Jackeys Marsh relocating to Meander.

Like most schools in rural communities, the cultural and social significance of the school was immense. There was great pride and interest in the school, and the entire community was often involved in fund raising projects. Annual school concerts were a highlight, as were school fairs, sporting events, fund raising balls and dances.

In 1988 the National Trust classified the school buildings, St Saviour's Church and Sunday School as a "historic precinct" in recognition of its cultural and social significance.

The school, like all schools, had its battles. In 1989 and 2011 it was targeted for closure by state government. On both occasions, strong community support was behind successful fights to keep the school open.

2011 closed on an optimistic note, with school numbers looking fair for the next 5 years. For reasons that are still unclear, school student numbers declined rapidly after 2012. The school's closure was announced by State Government media release on 21 December 2014.

## Current Use of the School Site

In August 2015 the Meander Valley Council accepted, in principle, an offer by the Department of Education to "transfer the site to Council at a peppercorn value on the



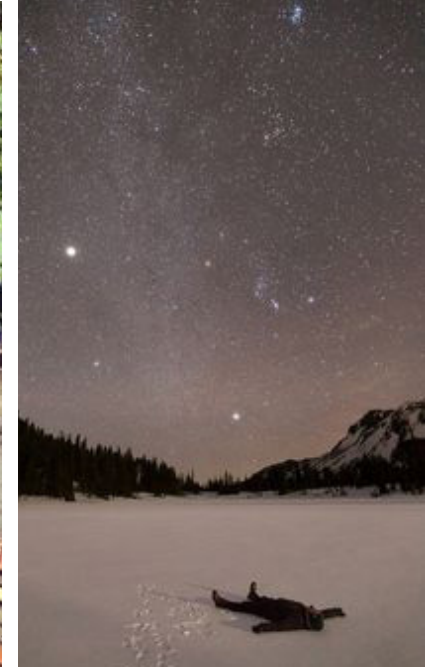
basis of Council working with the Meander Community to determine an appropriate use for the future".

On 16 November 2015 Council advertised for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for community use of the school site. Three EOIs met Council's criterion for a non-commercial enterprise: two drug rehabilitation centres, and a Centre for Digital Entertainment, Media Training and Production.

At the Council's June 2016 meeting, the faith-based organization Teen Challenge was endorsed as the preferred tenant for the school site, for a proposed drug rehabilitation centre for women and adolescent girls, including those with children. On 9 September 2016 Council signed a 5-year lease with Teen Challenge, with provision for two 5-year extensions of the lease.

*All images within this proposal were provided by MARRA members, except where otherwise stated.*

# Meander Commons: A Vision for the Future Use of the Meander Primary School Site ... continued



*Images supplied courtesy of Play St.*

## An Alternate Vision

A large percentage of Meander residents do not support Teen Challenge’s proposal for a drug rehabilitation centre at the site of the Meander Primary School.

Most residents in the district believe the school site should be used to help revitalize and grow the community of the Meander area.

There is also a strong feeling that the local community should have full access to the site that was the focal point of past and present students and residents for more than 100 years.

The Meander Area Residents and Ratepayers Association Incorporated (MARRA) was formed in response to concerns about the Teen

Challenge proposal and to represent those community members with an alternate vision for the school site.

This proposal outlines MARRA’s vision, providing Council with an alternative that can be swiftly rolled out, if and when the lease with the present tenants is terminated.

# Meander Commons: Proposal

**This community-based alternative for the former Meander Primary School site is a grass-roots option, developed by a large group of Meander residents who know their community well, are committed to its progress - and to fundraising to see the proposal through to fruition.**

The Meander Commons alternative has important advantages over the present use of the site in that:

- This large and centrally-located site in the Meander village will continue to be used by members of the Meander community, rather than being a limited-access facility administered by an external organisation;
- The local community will benefit from use of the site where they can pursue their leisure interests. Child-minding facilities could be provided and tourism attractions of the Meander area can be promoted;
- There would be the opportunity for community members to come together and share the site, assisting with requisite funding and maintenance decision-making. This community approach has been successful in similar undertakings such as the Mole Creek and Caveside swimming pools and Meander Memorial Hall;
- It will directly benefit the rural health of the Meander area, helping to offset the loss of social interaction and community identity that inevitably occurs when the school in a rural area closes;



- Community 'ownership' of the site and its facilities will ensure its future, preventing situations where the site becomes vacant and Council must go through the leasing process each time an external leaseholder leaves;
- Meander Commons use can begin immediately, without the need to remodel buildings and facilities, or wait for funds to be raised.

An outline of MARRA's vision for the school site is provided in this proposal. A detailed proposal will be prepared if and when the school site becomes available.

The proposal has yet to receive input from everyone in the Meander area, and interested parties elsewhere in Tasmania. Should Meander Valley Council see merit in MARRA's proposal, the first activity will be an extensive community consultation program to obtain additional ideas and feedback.

# Meander Commons: Funding and Timeline

**Use of the school site can commence immediately without the need to remodel buildings and facilities, or wait for funds to be raised. Maintenance work by MARRA members can also commence immediately without the need for funds.**

## Funding

An important part of the first year’s activities will be development of a fundraising strategy. The funding approach for Meander Commons will be the same used by most not-for-profit organisations, based on:

- Grants from Government, philanthropic and corporate groups;
- Donations;
- Membership fees;
- Special fundraising events (fetes, trivia nights, film nights, dances);
- Crowd funding;
- Products and services offered (e.g. local produce, training workshops by skilled members of the community);
- Community-Business partnerships (sponsorships).

If Council sees merit in the Meander Commons proposal, MARRA commits to working with Council in preparing a full business plan.

## Timeline

Meander Commons will be developed in stages, and adapting based on feedback and new information. A brief timeline of activities during the first two years is provided below. The outcomes of activities in the first two years will determine the nature and scale of activities in subsequent years.

First 6-12 months	Activity	12-24 months	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive community consultation for additional ideas and constructive feedback on those already proposed</li> <li>• Site assessment and maintenance</li> <li>• Council permits, as required</li> <li>• Some community uses (e.g. craft group, fly fishing club) suitable for facilities in their existing state</li> <li>• Initial fundraising</li> <li>• Development of fundraising strategy</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of full prospectus</li> <li>• Site maintenance and renovation</li> <li>• Further hire of rooms and facilities, as appropriate</li> <li>• Fundraising, including grant applications, and sponsorships</li> </ul>

# Meander Commons: Concept and Uses

**Meander Commons would consist of a multi-use site comprising a number of specific purpose spaces, similar in principle to Samford Commons in Moreton Bay, Queensland. An organising committee consisting of members of MARRA and other Meander community groups would accept applications for spaces, matching them to the needs of the community and the capacity of the groups to sustain their proposed activities. As needs change, so would the use of the site's spaces. As with the Meander Memorial Hall, groups would be required to contribute to usage costs of their allocated space, to fund maintenance and electricity, and equipment upkeep.**

MARRA members have identified the following uses of rooms on the former school site; having considered the community's current facility needs and existing community group activities:

## Meander Local History Room

Despite the existence of some written histories of aspects of Meander life, the village has no facility to store or display memorabilia and historical documentation.

The school precinct contains the most significant and most iconic buildings in the village of Meander. It is, in itself, a living piece of history and would therefore be the ideal location to house a local history collection including collected school memorabilia and photographic histories of the area. Relevant publications such as the Patricia Woods book and other booklets could be made available, as well as relevant community photographs.

Online facilities could be made available for family tree and Australian history searches. Such a facility would benefit the local community and visitors, who may have moved out of the area, and tourists interested in the history of the Central Highlands.

In addition, the Meander Local History Room would be a base for local residents who have expressed an interest in establishing a Meander Historical Society.



## Meander Art & Craft Gallery

Currently local artists and crafts people have no central space to exhibit their work or exchange ideas, leaving them isolated and unable to work co-operatively.

Dedicated gallery space would give them a place to meet and plan joint or individual exhibitions in which the whole community could share, creating social opportunities. This space also has the potential to be a venue within the Deloraine Craft Fair, in which Meander has never been involved; a positive step in linking towns of the area.

Using arts grants, the Meander Art and Crafts Gallery could be the base for an artist-in-residence, prompting visits from students from the four schools in the area and further.

## Meander Commons: Concept and Uses ... continued



### Club Rooms & Meeting Rooms

Meander Commons would provide needed meeting space for small to medium-sized groups – for both people within the Meander community and outside it. For example, the Quamby Fly Fishers Club and local craft groups could have a dedicated club room where they could permanently store their equipment and materials and run workshops.

Not needing to search for suitable meeting spaces would encourage residents to establish more social groups such as book clubs. The meeting spaces would also be suitable for work place training and assessment, computer skills and conflict resolution

Groups from other towns – social and business – could be attracted to use the facilities for small workshops, seminars and conferences, where appropriate facilities and equipment would be on hand. Supply of morning teas and lunches for these meetings would also offer fund-raising opportunities.

### Rural Skills Centre

Meander has a wealth of residents with the practical skills that are essential in a rural area: building, metalworking, machinery use and repair, fencing and farming.

Others who have recently moved to or retired to the area may wish to learn some of these skills but have no organised way to do it; young people in particular want to learn practical skills such as mending their bicycles and car maintenance. The training could also offer a means to complete the voluntary work requirements of job seekers on unemployment benefits.

Like a Men's Shed, an equipped Rural Skills Centre would offer people opportunities to socialise, share life experiences and skills, make things, fix things and support each other and their communities. This is especially important in an environment where farming industry changes have isolated people and put them at risk. A Men's Shed in Meander would cater for the area's diverse needs and complement the Men's Shed in Deloraine.



## Meander Commons: Concept and Uses ... continued



### Gateway to Adventure Camp

Building on the tourism potential of the area, Meander Commons could provide a limited amount of short stay accommodation and a camping area, suitable for small groups of schoolchildren, bush walkers, fishing clubs and outdoor adventure clubs.

Again, as the attractions of the Meander area become better known, the demand for short stay accommodation will grow, and may benefit residents who offer bed-and-breakfast style accommodation.

The World Fly Fishing Championships being hosted by Tasmania in 2019 will be a perfect opportunity to 'showcase' Meander.

### Tourism Information & Promotion Centre

With the Department of Parks and Wildlife's recent work to upgrade walks to Meander Falls, Chasm Falls, the Swinging Bridge and Split Rock, there is a strong need to promote the attractions of the Meander section of the Western Tiers.

Many tourists have inadequate information about the Meander area and so head for the well-promoted Cradle Mountain – whereas the Meander section of the Tiers could provide much-needed vehicles for experiential tourism in bushwalking, canoeing, abseiling, rock climbing, inland and fly fishing, star gazing and cycling.

A Tourism Information and Promotion Centre could be staffed by residents who know the area thoroughly, providing maps and fishing licenses as well as being a hub for people interested in establishing guiding businesses.

Building tourism in the Meander area may also encourage residents to move into the tourism accommodation industry in the wake of changes in farming.



*Image from Tasmania Photo Album (www.tasphotoalbum.com) reproduced by permission of Tony van Tongeren*

## Meander Commons: Concept and Uses ... continued

### Performance & Practice Studio

Currently local music groups such as the Meander Men's Choir must practice in one of their homes and perform in other towns with appropriate facilities, such as Deloraine or Westbury.

It is time Meander had a facility with seating and amplification equipment for small music and theatrical performances and rehearsals.

In the past Meander School has provided a performance venue on many occasions. A dedicated Performance and Practice studio will bring people together and provide a facility for all age groups, including local teenagers learning musical instruments at Deloraine High School.



### Community Garden, Seasonal Market & Cooking Demonstrations

The school grounds are already beautiful, and include a number of fruit trees. There is great potential for a community garden that grows fruit and vegetables using sustainable principles.

The Meander area has the capacity to host a small Sunday market in some seasons of the year. Produce from the community garden could be sold. Vendors at other local markets have already expressed interest.

The school site has suitable facilities such as the covered outdoor area which could be used for stalls, and a commercial kitchen for morning teas. These facilities could also be used for cooking demonstrations that showcase local produce. As time and funds permit, additional equipment (e.g. a pizza oven) could be added.

A seasonal market of this nature has the potential to be a gathering venue for local residents and to attract other people to the village.

# Meander Commons: concept and uses ... continued



## Children & Adult Extended Education

With the philosophy of education being a lifelong process, Meander School site could be used to extend the education opportunities of residents of all ages.

Children’s playgroups could take advantage of the school’s excellent existing children’s play equipment, grassed areas and indoor facilities.

The facilities could be used for occasional special-interest children’s and teenagers workshops in areas such as theatre, music, drumming, art and chess. Meander children currently must travel to participate in these activities.

Education for the growing retirement-age population of the Meander area would be facilitated with ICT and University of the Third Age-style classes and workshops.

**IN UNITY  
THERE IS STRENGTH**

## Visiting Therapeutic & Health Practitioner Room

Because Meander is a small town few businesses can be run there on a permanent basis.

To facilitate the provision of some of these services, Meander Commons could dedicate a location to be used by visiting practitioners of various massage, beauty and health therapists; and manicurists, podiatrists and alternative lifestyle practitioners.

In this way the town’s residents could benefit simply by providing a small-fee location for these practitioners – without needing to drive the usual long distances.



# Play St. Site Plan

## Whole Site Options

Entire site could be hired for functions/weddings/school groups to utilize at various times of the year to help provide an income to support the facility

## Existing Orchard & Kitchen Garden

Retain existing orchard and kitchen garden and cafe and utilise as part of potential cafe, seating can scatter beneath the trees and the produce can be used in the cafe or for the community

## Front Garden

Retain existing front garden as it has a strong aesthetic appeal. Create new entry to building 1 which could be used as an office/tourist info hub.

## Gravel Road

Potential to provide access through to rear of site to allow for emergency/maintenance/visitor vehicles and to open up entire site

## Bar/Cafe/Community Space

Link orchard and kitchen garden to deck and building for a potential community hub/cafe/bar etc.

## Existing Playground

Upkeep existing play items to service community as a recreation zone for all. Place picnic tables and chairs around edges for gathering at the facility

## Adventure Playground

Loose parts and building materials, shed for storage, flexible and creative play for children, camp fire area. Opportunity to incorporate mens shed with teaching and making/building skills to the younger generation. Utilise the existing water flow through the site and give structure to edges to form dry/ephemeral creek bed. Place tyre swing over.

## Tennis Court/Recreation Hub

Outdoor sports court with associated pavilion area or shelter for BBQ's, watching games outdoor ping pong etc. Outdoor court could accommodate a variety of sports, basketball etc.



## Suggestions for Repurposing of Buildings

The existing buildings have a lovely cohesive quality to them that lends itself to community spaces as well as repurposing to create new opportunities.

The following is a list of suggestions:

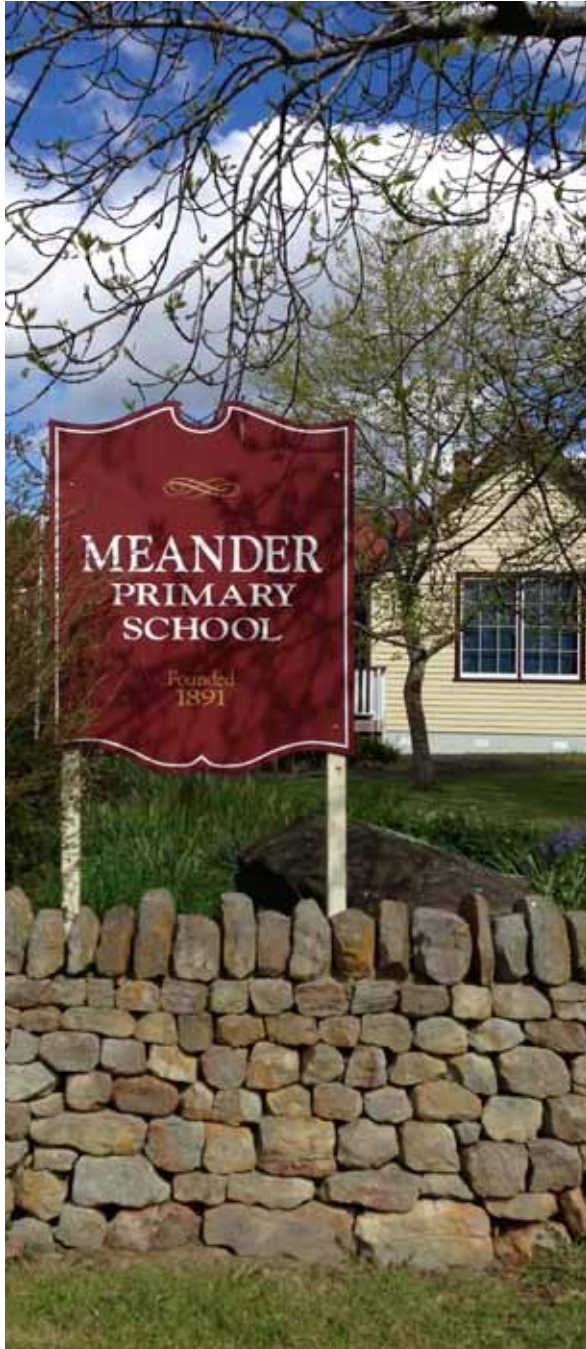
1. Office/tourist information combined with local history room
2. Cafe/bar, selling local produce, combined with Meander art and craft gallery/library
3. Theatre room and music events/music practice rooms/meeting room
4. Accommodation for fly fishing, school groups etc./boutique stays/itinerant health practitioners/children and adult ed classes
5. Undercover space for local markets, outdoor film nights
6. Artists in residence/education/child care/meeting rooms
7. Retain existing toilets - ideal location to serve entire site

## Open Space

Oval for kicking, running, community gatherings, picnics, open air films and star gazing/astro tourism surrounded by picnic tables and parkland.

Entire area could be set up for camping, caravans or small bush/eco cabins for accommodation. Gravel parking provided at edge.





## Meander School - 1891-2014

Schooling started in the Meander area in 1891, before the town of Meander was gazetted in 1907. The government rented a building from the Meander Church of England, a building now called the Sunday School. In 1901 the government purchased land next to the church and West Meander School was built c.1910–1911.

The school was a one room building that expanded to two rooms by 1927. During the 1930s and 1940s the regional importance of the school increased as nearby schools closed and some of their buildings and students relocated to Meander:

- Montana School, 1907-1944; school building moved to Meander in 1947–1948.
- Golden Valley School 1870 – 1945; school building moved to Meander.
- Western Creek School 1893 to 1938; school building moved to Mole Creek.
- Jackeys Marsh School 1900 – 1937, school building moved to Meander c1940.

The school remained known as West Meander School until 1949. From 1949 to 1968 it was known as Meander State School, offering both primary and secondary schooling (Grades 1–9). From 1968 the school became a primary only school known as Meander Primary School.

Like most schools in rural communities, the cultural and social significance of the school

was immense. There was great pride and interest in the school, and the entire community was often involved in fund raising projects. Annual school concerts were a highlight, as were school fairs, sporting events (especially football!), and fund raising balls and dances in the Meander Memorial Hall.

In 1988 the National Trust classified the school buildings, St Saviour’s Church and Sunday School as a “historic precinct” in recognition of its cultural and social significance.

The school, like all schools, had its battles. In 1989 there was shock when the government announced the school would be closed. A huge – and successful - fight began, with the community rallying to keep the school open. In 2011 the school was again targeted for closure by State Government, and strong community support was behind the successful fight to keep the school open.

In 2011 the school closed on an optimistic note, with student numbers looking fair for the next 5 years. For reasons that are still unclear, the school’s student numbers subsequently declined to the extent that expected numbers for 2015 were below 20.

The government announced the school’s closure on 21 December 2014. It was the end of an era in Meander, with everyone in the community saddened by its passing.