



BRT relocates info centre to town hall

BY MICHAEL POLLOCK

BALLARAT Regional Tourism has officially moved its Visitor Information Centre into town hall.

The VIC is now located on the ground floor of the building, with 80,000 tourists expected to walk through its doors over the next year.

However, the controversial site has been condemned by tourist bodies, which fear an anticipated lack of parking, particularly for longer vehicles, will deter visitors.

The new site features eight standard half-hour parks on Sturt Street and seven out the back, alongside two parks for longer vehicles on Bath Lane.

Previous temporary headquarters on Lydiard Street North accounted for only seven standard parks and no elongated spaces for caravans and motorhomes.

Despite the improvements, Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia member and Ballarat resident Grant Tillett has described the move as "short sighted".

"There's no doubt that it is not the best location for people with large vehicles," Mr Tillett said.

"Somewhere within the vicinity of the (Botanical) gardens would be nice, just for the ease of getting in (to

parks) and finding it.

"They're not the easiest place to get out of - I took my motorhome in there for a trial run and it's do-able, but lots of people won't want to go in there (Bath Lane)."

Bath Lane is a narrow strip behind town hall between Armstrong Street South and Lydiard Street South, intersected by Town Hall Lane in the middle of the block.

BRT chief executive George Sossi and City of Ballarat Councillor Peter Innes both defended the site at the launch on Monday.

"Parking is always a challenge in Ballarat," Mr Sossi said, adding that the new location is beneficial for community integration and highly accessible for visitors arriving by train.

"It's central, close to the railway station and I think it's a great spot," he said.

"It's in probably the most iconic building in town."

Mr Innes said the potential additions of satellite information centres around the edge of Ballarat could alleviate any parking concerns, while adding that council could look at increasing the parking spaces if needed.

"If you're travelling there, you're not going to be there for two or three hours, you want to get in and get out," he said.

"I'm not going to say we wouldn't look at it (more parks), if in the future we find that we need to extend it."

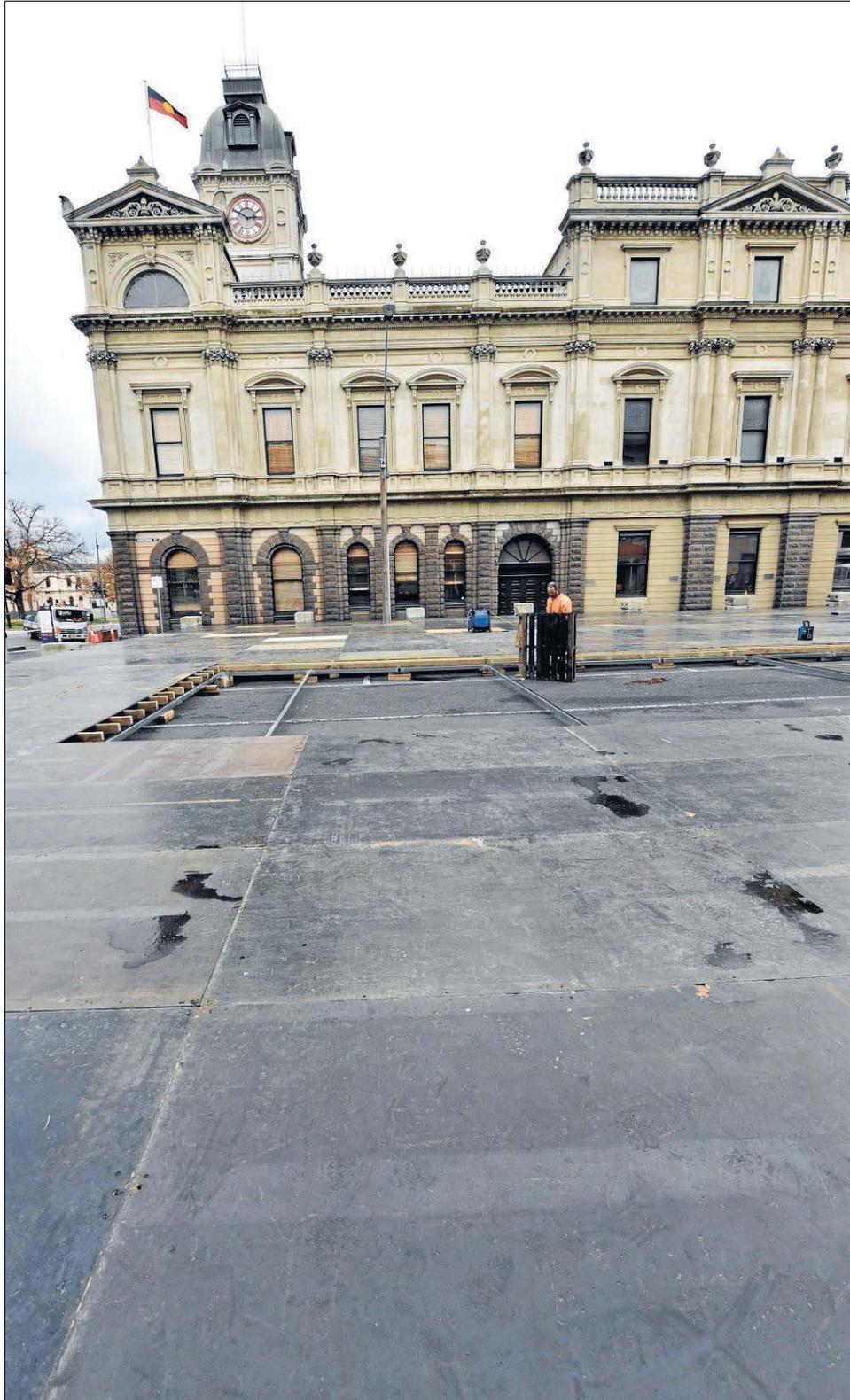
The new premises features an open-style layout, including a section for showcasing local products.

"The visitor information centre is a blend of new technology as well as existing collateral," Mr Sossi said.

"We've got six television screens and once we have our Wi-Fi connected, they will be streaming through our events and what's on today. All our social media feeds will come through there as well."

"There's a lot more room for display and an area dedicated to product display (from locals).

"Every two weeks we'll have a rotation."



NEW LOCATION: Ballarat Town hall is the new site of Ballarat Regional Tourism's Visitor Information Centre.



Opening the gates to campers

By Dominica Sanda

CAMPERS are now able to set up camp among the sweeping hills and countryside of Moss Vale all throughout the year.

Earlier this year council approved partial use of Moss Vale Showground for camping with 12 short stay campsites in the showground.

Last week, the Moss Vale Show Society received the official go-ahead to welcome campers onto the grounds.

Moss Vale Show Society president Brian Spence said the interest had been high with phone calls and bookings already coming in from interested campers.

"It's a beautiful district close to everything," he said.

Mr Spence said the approval would benefit the Moss Vale economy, tourism in the shire and the show society.

"Once people come here, they all spend money in town and across the shire," Mr Spence said.

"It will also help the show society immensely with income."

Mr Brian said the Moss Vale Show Society hadn't had a steady flow of income for a while and had been struggling financially for the past 10 years.

While the monthly markets help boost finances, Mr Brian said he hoped the income from camping would be a more regular source of income.

The money Moss Vale Show Society would receive from the

campsites would go into maintenance and upkeep of the grounds.

Economic Development and Tourism Committee chairman Councillor Ian Scandrett said the area needed to become a RV "friendly" shire and said he was "very pleased" to see the

extra motorhome spaces open.

"I look forward to Southern Highlands becoming even more RV and motorhome friendly and promoted accordingly," Cr Scandrett said.

"We will see much more stays here. It is consistent with our economic development and tourism strategies and workshops."

The campsites are available for a maximum stay of three months and will allow campervans, caravans, tents and lightweight temporary shelters but no permanent caravans will be allowed.

A caretaker will be on site to process bookings, registrations, keep records, manage the camping ground and especially minimise impacts on nearby residential properties.

Bookings can be made by calling 0474 186 458.



The space Brian Spence is standing on will soon be filled with motorhomes and happy campers.

Photo by Dominica Sanda