

Are we being told the truth about Flagstaff Hill?

I have been looking at visitor numbers for Flagstaff Hill and there are worrying signs.

The Vault: WCC spends \$450k and no report?

The Vault: F4Kids spends \$450k and no report?

Fun4Kids Festival 2015: the results are in



Scenes from inside the 2015 Fun4Kids Festival. Image: Warrnambool City Council.

Analysis – Carol Altmann

The figures for the 2015 Fun4Kids Festival are in, and it's a case of good news and bad news for the Warrnambool City Council and, by default, its ratepayers.

The good news is that it didn't blow the bank.

In other words, it kept within the \$450,000 budget that was set aside last October and avoided anything like the \$150,000 blow-out of last year. Phew.

The bad news, however, is that the festival is attracting less people and therefore, you can assume, generating less economic and tourism benefits to Warrnambool but still costing \$450,000 to run.

While there is still no official report on the results, the council released some figures to *Bluestone* today which said about 15,000 tickets were sold for the seven day event.

Last year, when the event ran over eight days, it attracted 19,758 people.

Of the 15,000 tickets sold this year, 24% were from metropolitan Melbourne – the highest percentage ever – which sounds like great news, until you work out that equates to only 3600 people compared to 3965 in 2015 and 5590 in 2013.

When you are coming off a smaller base, the percentages start to get wobbly.

It is extremely difficult to run a critical eye over a children's festival – after all, it is aimed at children for god's sake – but someone also needs to be the kid in the crowd as the Emperor marches by and point out that he is wearing no clothes.

So *Bluestone*, at risk of being deemed “too negative”, is prepared to say that the Fun4Kids Festival is getting precariously close to being bare-butt naked.

The reason is that the festival is no longer what it was designed to be, which was a major tourism attraction for Warrnambool.

Indeed in its heyday, the festival was pulling crowds of more than 32,000 people: double what it now achieves.

It was also costing less – far less – and at one point it was thought the council may not need to subsidise it at all because it would cover all of its own expenses. Such a notion now seems fanciful.

Here is the critical stat: in 2005, not long after the festival first began, it cost the council \$156,354 and attracted 32,112 people.

This year, it cost up to \$450,000 and attracted 15,000 people.

These are the cold, hard facts and [why council staff last October recommended](#) that the festival be discontinued because it had seemingly had its day.

But the decision to kill Peppa Pig, as it were, proved too emotional for the majority of the councillors and they agreed to press on in 2015 – turning the festival into more of a grassroots, simple-kids-fun kind of event with an extra heavy reliance on volunteers.

According to council spokesman **Nick Higgins**, this formula is set to be repeated in 2016.

“Council will shortly call for expressions of interest from local people keen to be part of the festival’s community consultation panel,” he said via email.

“The panel worked well this year and generated plenty of ideas and enthusiasm for the festival.”



It is wonderful to see such ideas and enthusiasm and I am sure most of the 15,000 people who turned up this year had a terrific time, but is this the best use of \$450,000 each year to generate more visitors to Warrnambool?

Cr Kylie Gaston [asked a question this week](#) of **Cr Brian Kelson**, when he successfully pushed for free CBD parking over December and January, as to where the \$70,000 in lost car parking revenue could be cut from within the budget.

I can think of at least one area....

For my money, I think free off-street parking over the busy summer period will do more for local traders than seven days of Fun4Kids where most of the action is confined to a plastic

palace on the Civic Green.

If we want to continue to run a kid's festival for, mostly, local and regional kids to enjoy, then let's embrace that idea and stop pretending that Fun4Kids is a major tourism magnet.

It was once, but it is no longer, and there still needs to be a full and frank conversation about its long-term future.



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