

Council learns to ask first on charge schemes

BASS Coast Shire Council appears to have learned an important lesson after the Cape Paterson Special Charge Scheme project blew up in its face earlier this year.

With a similar road and drainage scheme for Sunset Strip now on the cards, councillors last week voted in favour of conducting a simple survey first.

This will gauge support among property owners before expensive concept plans are drawn up.

It seems to be a logical step in the process, but it's something the council failed to do for Cape Paterson.

In that case, designs were completed and modified, detailed costings were compiled

By Gav Ross

and the council got to the point of notifying residents it intended to declare the scheme.

The project was eventually abandoned in April after an overwhelming number of objections flowed in during the official submission period.

In total, the debacle resulted in a waste of almost \$260,000.

A new report presented to councillors last week confirmed that only \$22,000 had been spent on preliminary work at Sunset Strip thus far, including informal community consultation sessions where road safety and traffic issues were also discussed.

Regarding Cape Paterson's failed scheme, Cr Brad Drew

admitted at last week's meeting that council may have "put the cart before the horse".

"When we talk special charge schemes people generally shudder, but we're closing the loop here," he said.

"By sending out a survey document, we're going to get a strong indication very early as to how residents feel about seeing their streetscape developed."

Cr Andrew Phillips said getting the survey out "early in the piece" was a positive.

"For Cape Paterson, we were put into the position of voting on whether a scheme would have commenced, but council had already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on it," he said.

Cr Jordan Crugnale, who campaigned against a user-pays road and drainage scheme at Inverloch before she became a councillor, described the survey as "a vital step in the process".

"There was certainly a lesson learnt from Cape Paterson and the Inverloch scheme, too," she said.

"We actually need to gauge support before we start spending time and ratepayers' money on detailed design."

The report notes that if a scheme for Sunset Strip went ahead, the average bill for a "standard property" would be between \$14,000 and \$15,500.

A new report is expected to come back to council later in the year.