

A Vision For Mt Wilson

2012 – 2025

In response to the request of the Blue Mountains City Council for a contribution to the development of Council's Community Strategic Plan: Sustainable Blue Mountains 2025, the Mt Wilson Progress Association has surveyed the community in December 2012 and built on and updated previous submissions for the plan with a view on the outlook, activities and needs of the unique historic garden village. Please address any queries about the submission to the Secretary of the Association, Moira Green on 02 4756 2162 or rmgreen@bigpond.com.

**The Mt
Wilson
Progress
Association
submission**

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A VISION FOR MT WILSON 2012 – 2025

INTRODUCTION

The development of Mt Wilson began in the 1870s as successful Sydney merchants sought a cool climate refuge for their families from the heat, humidity and ambience of a horse-drawn city environment. The early houses built were substantial. Exotic gardens were established, taking advantage of the rich basalt soil to grow trees and shrubs brought from Europe and other parts of the world. The early property owners were supported by personal staff and gardeners, while timber cutters supplied the timber for local construction and were soon shipping sleepers for railway developments.

The ‘Indian hill station’ origins of Mt Wilson led to the creation of a unique village with many large gardens and extensive public areas, but today it only has a small population not large enough to support as much a local café or general store. Lithgow and Katoomba, 70 to 85 kilometres round-trip away, are the closest shopping and service centres. Although Mt Wilson is small and remote, the community supports active community organisations committed to improving, protecting and recording the history of the area.

POPULATION

In which direction should we encourage the village to head into the future?

The following is the approximate situation:

Number of houses in 1950	37
Number of houses in 2003	99
Population in 2003	180
Number of houses in 2012	107
Population in 2012	186
Full time	62
Part time	124

Of the current population one third are permanent residents. The remainder have their main residence elsewhere, mainly Sydney. The typical age of residents is over 65, mostly retired with independent children. With increasing age, limited ability for activity and health concerns often cause people to leave. There is a great need for younger people to maintain a balance and vibrancy, and to run the fire station. However, there has been only one child born in the area in more than 30 years and that family is moving from Mt Wilson. There are five permanent residents under the age of 35. For many years no new young people have established, or maintained homes in the area.

We believe it would be possible for the number of houses to increase by approximately 40% to 140 using existing titles. Most current residents would be reluctant to see a big increase as would occur if further subdivision was allowed as it would destroy the ambience which brings and keeps them here. The limited facilities with no reticulated water or sewerage work against substantial additional development in an area surrounded by national park.

Young people need jobs and careers and the opportunities are limited to the big gardens, artistic endeavours, bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and possibly working from home using the Internet. Realistically, this is not likely to change markedly so we cannot expect to attract and keep any significant number of young people.

The impact of an aging local population

Unfortunately many of our older residents feel that they have to leave the village eventually to seek easier access to medical, shopping and support services. Again, realistically, this is not going to change markedly.

The problems likely to develop with the aging of the Mt Wilson population are currently being exacerbated by the lack of interest of people who might previously have considered buying either a second house or a retirement home in the area. This situation is no doubt made worse by the current prolonged weak economic circumstances. It remains to be seen if there is a new generation of younger buyers keen to get away from the city and commit the time, personal effort and funds to maintaining large established gardens and properties often with five or more acres.

In the recent past, there have been about fifteen Mt Wilson properties on the market, some for years at a time. In the past three years, only six properties have sold.

Concern has been expressed over the possibility that without a significant influx of new owners to Mt Wilson during the next decade the area could experience the same sort of decline affecting the Mt Victoria area.

The significant activities of the Progress Association, the local fire brigade, the First Responders paramedic support team, the Village Hall Committee, the Historical Society, St George's Anglican Church, the former school now study centre, the Bush Care Group, and the Bush Walking Group are largely carried out by volunteers from the older, retired age group. It is possible that during the Sustainable Blue Mountains 2025 Community Strategic Plan period Council may need to be more directly involved with the management and maintenance of the public areas in Mt Wilson.

VISITORS

A gradual increase in population would inject momentum into the community and provide much needed members for the various organisations, in particular the fire brigade. Nevertheless for the foreseeable future the village will continue to attract older people and an increase in total full-time and part-time population to about 300 could be comfortably assimilated without the village losing its unique charm. The December 2012 community survey found that less than half the residents of the village spend more than 75% of their time in Mt Wilson.

Visitors come to Mt Wilson for the same reasons which have brought us all here – the exotic gardens, mountain views, bushwalking, canyoning, its quiet and remoteness, and its unique character. The quiet and non-commercial atmosphere means that it does not appeal to everyone. In fact, it has tended to attract fewer but often intensely devoted people.

There was an expectation a decade ago that with the upgrading of roads such as Windsor Road and construction of the M7 and with improved accessibility and shorter travel times – less than two hours from the Sydney CBD – more people would wish to buy in and visit Mt Wilson. This has not happened.

While new owners and more visitors, who may one day wish to be residents, would be welcomed by the community, at the same time the current unique status of the village would not survive a large influx of visitors with any sort of major demand for commercial food facilities and less interest, perhaps, in gardens and walking. Most residents are willing to welcome visitors and to share the beauty of the village with similar people but have strong feelings about preserving the current character of the area. Fine weather during holiday periods like Easter at the peak of the Autumn tree colours, brings a rare taste of what mass tourism would be like. At times like this the camping ground at Cathedral Reserve can become very noisy and stressful for neighbouring properties.

Guidelines for dealing with future visitors should include:

1. Expansion of our network of village walking paths

In addition to the path made from Silva Plana to Cathedral of Ferns, the network of unmade public roads and fire trails should be opened up, delineated and all marked on local walking maps. This would also assist the Rural Fire Service. Perhaps the existing excellent booklet, *Mount Wilson Walks*, should provide additional information such as historical interest notes on the outstanding properties and on flora encountered along the route. The booklet could be made available from the community website of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine mtwilson.com.au and be available for purchase at open gardens.

We should make it a key objective to encourage visitors to park their cars, get out and walk. Mt Wilson is a walker's delight and these are the visitors we should encourage.

2. Information about the village

The scope and quality of the village plan and information board near the post box should be upgraded to an all-weather, vandal proof and user friendly map and board. It should highlight the natural features, walkways, open gardens, toilets and B&Bs. Suitably positioned road signs would indicate their locations, where not already in place.

The existing pamphlet, *Mt Wilson New South Wales*, is maintained up-to-date and will continue to be provided free next to the information board.

The booklet, *The Story of Mt Wilson*, should be revised and upgraded to be a glossy, higher priced publication which would appeal particularly to well-heeled visitors. There is much material available on the village to include in such a book.

3. Camping

We have seen that camping in Cathedral Reserve can be noisy for neighbouring properties. While Council maintains picnic shelters and toilets there, it is not officially designated as a "Camping Area". The lack of clarity about the status of the reserve has meant no authority recognises responsibility for good order in an area occasionally marred by excessively loud music and the smashing of bottles.

4. Children

To encourage young families we should provide a slippery dip and swings at Cathedral Reserve and/or Silva Plana. This would signal that we do want young families to visit and it would be welcomed by parents.

5. Economics

In return for enjoying our village, some visitors are happy to pay to see private gardens, visit the Turkish Bath or stay at a bed-and-breakfast. Most walkers and canyoneers spend no money locally and sometimes need to be rescued. We should consider making information available at key visitor locations and on the Mt Wilson website inviting contributions for the support of the public areas maintained by the Progress Association on behalf of BMCC.

While additional funding is always welcome, we must continue to present Mt Wilson as a quiet, unique village with beautiful lanes and gardens through which to stroll.

REGULATIONS

Ideally we would like to attain more independent responsibilities with respect to the major authorities which affect us, the Blue Mountains City Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Blue Mountains City Council

Currently, on behalf of BMCC, the Mt Wilson Progress Association employs contractors to maintain the public areas of Mt Wilson including maintenance of the walking tracks, grass cutting, street tree planting and maintenance, removal of fallen branches and trees, weed eradication, maintenance of the war memorial, flagpoles and surrounding grounds, and the putting out and bringing in each week of all the rubbish bins in the public areas.

Council's straitened financial circumstances and the high costs of sending Council staff and contractors to Mt Wilson have led in some cases to years' long delays in work being done

after Council staff have agreed the work should be done. In other cases, the Mt Wilson Progress Association has paid for work and facilities in the village. For example, to prevent cars entering and degrading the Silva Plana playing field the gate and posts were purchased by the MWPA and installed by Council. The cylindrical steel barbeques in Cathedral Reserve were purchased and put in by the Association as have many street trees.

The recent community survey found 57% of respondents rated either 1 or 2 on a scale of 1 to 5 the value Mt Wilson receives from Council in return for the property rates paid.

Routine council work

While the Mt Wilson community has been pleased to support Council with the management and maintenance of the public areas including the Village Hall, there is widespread disappointment Council has not been responsive and efficient in meeting many requests for routine council work to be done. For example, when staff of the seniority of program manager have visited the village and agreed work should be done rather than that manager simply issuing a work order with a completion deadline, a second more junior officer has been sent out to consider the issue. Then, as often as not, work is still not completed many months and sometimes years later. A focus on cost-efficient management decision making and operations execution would appear likely to achieve significant benefits.

Council capital works

The major on-going requirement for Council capital works in Mt Wilson is the construction and sealing of unmade roads where current use or new home construction makes the dirt roads seriously unsafe and too often untrafficable. A plan and realistic short-term timetable for carrying out the pressing need for shaping and sealing roads such as Farrer Road West will be wholeheartedly welcomed by the community.

The current investigation and then commitment of capital for the eventual replacement of the old and failing elms in The Avenue is a high priority for the long term maintenance of what is perhaps the most iconic part of Mt Wilson.

Finalisation of planning approval and construction of the current work in the hands of Council for the improvement of access and the toilet facilities in the Mt Wilson Village Hall is most welcome. The Village Hall Committee is committing funds raised locally to support this project which however remains dependant on government grants for the work to be done.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

The National Parks and Wildlife Service controls the national parks surrounding Mt Wilson but the Service's stewardship falls short of our expectations. We believe NPWS staff should play a role in visitor management and safety in the park precincts, weed control, bushfire hazard reduction and walking track maintenance. We would like NPWS to establish an on-going regular responsive staff contact with authority to assign and direct necessary agreed work to be done.

PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

The Mt Wilson Progress Association should continue in its present form. The Association with 130 members represents about 70 per cent of the people of Mt Wilson. It has achieved much for the village over many years due to the dedication of hardworking volunteers. It must continue to represent the membership and to liaise with the other village organisations and to be the political voice of the village. It should not be involved with private property matters.

A key role of the Progress Association is to ensure that the various strands of village activity are functioning harmoniously. This is important in a village where many people have passionate beliefs in what is best for the village as is illustrated in the survey comments.

Comprehensive information about the role, activities and the newsletters of all the Mt Wilson community organisations is available at the website mtwilson.com.au.

FLORA

The flora is a major component of the uniqueness and charm of Mt Wilson and the task for the future must be to augment this exceptional foundation. Although it is the exotic gardens which are the most stunning, the native environment is also very important.

Private gardens: The aim should be to maintain the freedom of the owners to continue in their present form. They should be encouraged to maintain the current style of their gardens and to keep weeds under control by regular and persistent advice in the Newsletter. However, weed control is also a BMCC responsibility.

Parks and public areas: The planting and maintenance of the street trees and trees in other public areas is a responsibility delegated by the Council that has long been accepted by the Progress Association, which engages contractors to do the work. Rainforest areas should be encouraged and protected in areas such as the Cathedral of Ferns, Waterfall Reserve and the charming walk from the bottom of Davies Lane to Shadforth Road. The diversity in native species planted should be encouraged and labelled. The Mt Wilson Bushcare Group already has a splendid record in keeping these areas free of weeds. Council also commits resources to weed eradication.

The most significant current tree project being supported by Council is the investigation and commitment to the eventual replacement of the old and failing elms in The Avenue.

National Parks: We are surrounded by Wollemi National Park in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area which is the responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Our dissatisfaction with the current stewardship derives particularly from the Service's poor record with hazard reduction measures

Our aim is to maximise our own measures in these matters. We can then press our case at the highest level for more involvement and responsibility from NPWS as suggested above. The community recognises that if we are prepared to be proactive and self-helpers, we will increase our chances of inducing assistance and cooperation from authorities.

SAFETY

Mt Wilson is an isolated village with one access road in an area subject to bushfire and rigorous climatic conditions. We need to strive, long term, for:

- The re-opening of an all-weather alternative escape route via Bowens Creek to Bilpin.
- Maintenance of the capability and effectiveness of the Mt Wilson Rural Fire Service brigade. In addition to fighting bushfires, the brigade regularly attends motor vehicle accidents on The Bells Line of Road, and members with special training assist with the all-too-frequent need to rescue bushwalkers and canyoneers in difficulties or injured in the national park.
- Maintenance of the capability and effectiveness of the Mt Wilson First Responders Team of trained local residents who respond immediately in the event of local accidents and

injuries or serious health incidents before ambulance and paramedic staff are able to reach the area.

CONCLUSION

Our vision remains unchanged: the future of Mt Wilson must be to retain its magic and its uniqueness. It must be to continue to attract residents and visitors who are in tune with its culture and traditions. It must be to maximise our own influence on our future.

APPENDIX

Mt Wilson Community Survey, December 2012

The Blue Mountains City Council asked the Mt Wilson Progress Association to contribute to the development of Council's Community Strategic Plan: Sustainable Blue Mountains 2025. An online and hard copy questionnaire was distributed to Mt Wilson residents to have their say on how they value our local organisations and see changes happening and affecting the way of life in our unique location. The survey was open for responses between 23 November and 4 December 2012. There were an extraordinarily high number of responses: 80 for the 120 questionnaires distributed. Many detailed comments were made. Many responses indicated they were on behalf of a household. The identity of those who responded is confidential and anonymous.

Perhaps the most interesting outcome of the survey is the very wide range of opinions expressed on many of the issues the community faces. The Progress Association has taken these views into account in the preparation of this submission in response to the Council's request and for the ongoing work of the Association.

Q1 Do you support the character of Mt Wilson remaining essentially as it is?

Response: Yes—85% No—15%

Q2 If the answer was No, what changes would you like to see?

Selected comments: Mt Wilson is so unique and beautiful please leave it as it is to Introduce some commercial zoning to enable retail tourism, attract younger members of society to start small businesses such as coffee shops, restaurants, start-up cottage industries such as art galleries, selling local crafts, shops selling local seasonal produce such as walnuts / chestnuts / flowers / plants / jams / relishes, attract more visitors to the Mt Wilson precinct. One wish stood out: there is strong support for there being a café/restaurant in Mt Wilson. Other comments: It amazes me people come to live at Mt Wilson and then want to make major changes, updating properties & modernising old houses. Preferred how it was 20 years ago. A community which has no essential services is destined to die. It is only natural and this is currently the state of Mt Wilson. Would like to see some more serious weed reduction & encouragement of residents to reduce weeds on their properties. No more unnecessary introduced street trees & "tidying up" of streetscapes - loss of bush character (& more maintenance). I would be very alarmed if the possibility of changing the LEP subdivision conditions was on the agenda. The appeal of Mt Wilson seems to be diminishing in proportion to all the recent development. NEED A LOCAL CAFE – ESSENTIAL. More work needs to go into maintaining open areas (fields & paddocks) and open vistas and views. We are now seeing most properties over planted. The drive though The Avenue will become a green tunnel over the next 20 years. The absence of any eating or small shopping facilities is a drawback.

Q3 Is it your perception there have been significantly fewer visitors to Mt Wilson, especially in Spring and Autumn, in recent years than 10 to 15 years ago?

Response: Yes—71% No —29%

Selected comments: Garden owners now charge much more, petrol is much dearer. There are gardens open to the public all over the country. There are many more organised activities for everyone, especially during the weekends. I think the visitors have perhaps come for different purposes – more campers, bushwalkers, canyoneers, chestnut pickers, etc.

Q4 Do you think the higher fuel costs and difficult economic circumstances of recent years will be overcome and visitor numbers increase any time in the next four or five years?

Response: Yes—42% No—58%

Selected comments: Economic prospects show not much sign of improvement. Don't think that there is an issue. Not unless there is an active program to make people come. Who knows – let me consult my crystal ball! I think that the younger generation are more likely to live in the city and less interested in gardening than our generation was. Hopefully! I disagree with the underlying premise; I doubt that economic circumstances are that difficult for the sort of people who visit here – that's a media and political beat-up. Also, if fuel costs are a factor, why should they come down? It is unlikely that they will.

Q5 Would you agree that an early and positive visit to Mt Wilson was a significant factor in you later becoming a resident.

Response: 82% —Yes No—18%.

Selected comments: Mt Wilson is a unique, rare and magnificent place. My first visit in the early 1980s made a lasting impression (but) it was not until 1996 that I had the opportunity to buy a property there. It was one of my parents' favourite picnic spots and we came quite often. My family has been here for over 100 years – that was a positive factor. Early visits as a child, and later with my wife and children, were very significant factors in eventually becoming a resident. The "Magic" of the Village enchanted us, however, after a number of years of owning a property here the isolation, total lack of amenities, apparent desire of the village to remain in the past and difficult access is eroding the appeal. There will always be those wanting large semi-rural garden properties. Mount Wilson also has a very, very strong sense of community which is extremely inclusive. I, like many others, are drawn to its "sleepy" timeless character, and don't really want to see development that would try to crowd it with people as in Leura. It has quiet space.

Q6 Do you think consideration should be given to working to increase the number of visitors to Mt Wilson, particularly targeting people who one day might like to become residents.

Response: 73%—Yes No—27%.

Selected comments: Without second order infrastructure, specifically a shop/pub/cafe, it's a difficult place to stay, or to live! Makes the prospect of selling more realistic. Who's job would this be - I hope not another job for the MWPA! But not by changing what it has to offer, just by perhaps promoting it differently. I think people become residents for many different reasons and this diversity is a really good thing. Just increasing the number of visitors and giving them a positive experience should lead to more interest in becoming residents. Mt Wilson is a bit of a secret. It has great appeal to a reasonably small percentage of people. If there were more visitors it would be beneficial to the area's long term future. I don't think the area is in danger of being loved to death. I dislike gawking tourists, however, how do you ever realise the asset that kept you so busy if no one comes here, and you wish to sell. Target younger members who may start a family, later provide a school bus service? Just leave the place alone. People trying to "improve" the place is what has stuffed it up.

Q7 In the interest of increasing visitor numbers among people who may in future become residents would you be happy to see:

More local B&Bs Yes—73% No—27%

A local café Yes—90% No—10%

Marketing and promotion encouraging garden visitors, picnickers and walkers Yes—79% No—21%

An upgrade of the walking map and information board in The Avenue Yes—84% No—16%

Selected comments: Actively promote the Autumn colour and changes in the season. Provide better facilities for campers and day visitors. The release of the film *The Great Gatsby* would be an ideal opportunity to promote the village to a wider range of people. More local B&Bs would certainly be good, and a local café even more so. We have had a number of people who have opened a cafe and all have presented a really nice atmosphere. However, it is a lot of work and is an intermittent return on money & energy. A printed walking map available in a box, say at the fire station, like those you can get in some national parks, would be a good. Most of our friends who visit comment on the lack of a café – this seems to be important to many people. An alternative to a local cafe would be a tuck truck or similar non-permanent means of delivering a sandwich and a decent cup of coffee. It seems very clear from experience that a shop/cafe would not be economic, and I would propose that residents pay a levy to underwrite a community co-op shop/cafe (say \$1,000 per household) that is open an hour a weekday (with volunteer staff), and at the weekend (with paid staff). Advertising may be a little hard to swallow for some of the community. I think the website is as far as we need to go except for advertising special events.

Q8 In the recent past, there have been about fifteen Mt Wilson properties on the market. In the past three years, only six properties have sold. As you consider your future in Mt Wilson, is this situation a concern for you?

Response: 55%—Yes No—45%

Selected comments: We are getting older and it is inevitable we will have to sell. The turnover of properties here is obviously of concern because most of them are high-value and many of the owners, who might find themselves in the situation of needing to release the funds tied up in those properties, may have difficulty if those funds cannot be made available. It's very difficult to see what can be done about this; most of us will have to leave here at some time. I believe that this is cyclical. It is also related to house prices in Sydney: I think that people have less disposable income to buy a "weekender". Two things may happen: a house price adjustment in Sydney, and/or a house price adjustment in Mount Wilson. This situation is obviously of concern to anyone who owns a property here and recognises that few of us will end our days here. When I first came as a permanent resident, there were 96 properties listed in the phone book. (53 occupied full-time). There are now 148 properties with about 43 occupied so they have dropped from over 50% to about 1/3. At least 18 new houses have been built, many on a grand scale and 37 have been substantially upgraded. Are there too many houses for the number of people who actually want to own here? Are younger people of more modest means and aspirations put off by the high prices? The GFC fallout means less disposable funds at a level to afford a property here. Once, properties were seldom advertised, and sold word of mouth. Now you can't give them away. My property 10 years ago was worth over a million, now I couldn't sell it for 800k, having substantially improved it. There was a functioning Post Office, a school and regular deliveries from merchants in Lithgow. What is there to attract a young family with kids here except lots of travelling? It seems the value of our investment has decreased upwards of 25% in the past 5 to 10 years. There is no indication that this will be reversed anytime soon making our continuing ownership in the Village a huge concern and financial disincentive. The owners are asking ridiculous prices, many times what they paid in some cases and

some because they overcapitalised in the short term, mainly because they are being greedy. Ask any real estate agent, the properties will sell at the right price. Some of the current owners simply will not accept anything like the right price but want unrealistically high prices. People who are forced to leave due to ill health cannot wait for many years to sell their properties. I am concerned that there will be a number of "derelict" buildings that devalue surrounding properties. It is not unique to Mt Wilson - the market for second properties has evaporated but it is part of an economic cycle which will eventually correct.

Q9 If you had to permanently leave Mt Wilson, is it likely that your family would continue owning or living here?

Response: Yes—33% No—47% Not applicable—19%

Selected comments: My observation is that the owners of properties retained only or primarily as weekenders frequently have problems maintaining the properties and the gardens satisfactorily. Unlikely that our family would purchase here. They consider the "downsides" outweigh the positives. Highly unlikely although we are encouraging the idea. My children and their families are city and job focused. They have no interest in the work, personal effort and commitment to house and garden maintenance involved in living in Mt Wilson. The house was built by my family, I can't see it being a residence to any outside us for a significant amount of time.

Q10 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, how important do you think it is additional services such as visiting nurses should be provided for older members of the community?

Response: 1: 4%, 2: 7%, 3: 24%, 4: 17%, 5: 48%

Selected comments: As in any community, it is better if older people can remain in their homes with additional supports if they so wish. As the property owners, taxpayers and residents of Mount Wilson pay taxes and rates on the same basis as others in the community, we should have access to the same facilities. Access to services generally available in other parts of the community is also a matter of equity and fairness. Just as the community works together to support the rural fire brigade, I think it should be able to work together to support residents with special needs rather than relying heavily on outside help, which may or may not happen depending on the latest funding for/policies of relevant governments. I didn't think the idea of visiting nurses here is realistic. When people reach the stage when they need such services they should probably not be living at Mount Wilson. Furthermore it is highly unlikely that government – either state or local – will be able to, or at all interested in, funding such positions. Visiting medical services are important the older people in the community. But activities which attract and support younger people are also important.

Q11 Currently the Mt Wilson community has committed members, many well over retirement age, running and working for the Progress Association, Fire Brigade, Historical Society, Village Hall, St George's Church, and other groups. In the absence of requests from younger people to join and lead these groups, are you concerned about the future effectiveness and local control of such core community activities?

Response: Yes—76% No—24%

Selected comments: Over the years, there has been a shift in community views about leadership in the community. There have been community group practices and attitudes which have precluded or discouraged weekenders from fully participating. Holding meetings during the week or on Friday nights or preventing telephone participation in meetings

assumes that everyone can get to them is a practical discouragement to part-timers to participate. When you look at the people who are active in one organisation and then compare names in another organisation, there seems to be a real core of people who volunteer for not one or two organisations but for many. I am somewhat concerned about the fire brigade. The age of most of the members means that it might be difficult to mount effective operations in the event of a large fire that lasts for some time. My wife and I joined the RFS because we felt it was unfair and unreasonable to expect others to look after our property in the event of a dangerous bushfire. We note that there are dedicated and highly effective members of the RFS. There are also committed and effective members of the Progress Association, who do a good job. The age of these people doesn't really matter. The age of active Fire Fighters is a concern and the Brigade is actively trying to get more younger people (children of residents, gardeners) to do FB training and become more active. This issue may also be a concern with the dwindling church attendance. The work experience of those actively involved may even be an advantage. We need to keep working to attract younger people into local organisations. If people move here in their late 50s we should be on the front foot to encourage their involvement. Weekenders are naturally focussed on maintaining and improving their properties, and have less time for community activities. But we should encourage involvement as much as possible. St Georges Church is a problem and the church may be sold. If so we should look for possible ways to use the building, which is an ideal location at the centre of the village.

Q12 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, how do you rate the usefulness and interest you find in the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Community Newsletter?

Response: 1: 1%, 2: 0%, 3: 9%, 4: 18%, 5: 72%

Selected comments: We look forward to receiving our copy. Lovely to know what is going on. Great. This was particularly helpful when we first moved here and made us aware that we belonged to a very active community. Love it! The newsletter is a great innovation and very welcome. It doesn't seem to get a lot of community feedback or contributions, despite the big efforts of the newsletter people to get them. It's an excellent newsletter and seems to be valued by the community. It is very inwardly focused so of limited use to outsiders (I know this is not its intention but maybe it would be a way to encourage broader community interest and commitment?) Excellent, useful publication!

Q13 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, how do you rate the usefulness and interest you find in the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Community Website?

Response: 1: 4%, 2: 4%, 3: 18%, 4: 30%, 5: 45%

Selected comments: I don't use it. Great initiative - really useful for all organisations, residents and visitors - well done! Really good, professional looking, useful information. A surprising amount of information on it. An excellent resource but not used personally by me. The website is well designed and highly professional; it is far better than many websites – easy to get around and provides a great deal of useful information. If a way could be found to advertise it widely, i.e. getting links to other sites which may be better known, this would surely be the venue for advertising houses and encouraging people to come to Mount Wilson. I do not access it. A few things are out of date and more interaction through the web site by the community would enliven it, we all communicate outside it. First rate. The up to date extensive information is quite outstanding for such a small community.

Q14 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, what is your perception of the usefulness and preparedness of the volunteer Mt Wilson Rural Fire Brigade to provide fire fighting services to the community?

Response: 1: 1%, 2: 0%, 3: 4%, 4: 16%, 5: 79%

Selected comments: The majority of residents who are not heavily involved in the brigade would have no idea. The fire brigade is well served by some very competent people and does a good job in terms of maintaining fire trails, conducting or contributing to fuel reduction burns and providing the basic training needed for people to make a sensible contribution in the event of serious fire. The Brigade seems really dedicated to providing fire fighting services and getting the villages prepared. I see a big challenge in getting the people of the village who aren't actively involved in the Brigade to understand their responsibility in preparing their properties and having a fire plan. Zero. They don't do any practical back burning. Just dress ups and playing on the radio. A concern is the lack of fire hazard reduction activities across the village. Otherwise the team is dedicated and well organised. I appreciate how proactive they are in educating residents about fire awareness and safety.

Q15 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, what is your perception of the usefulness and effectiveness of the work done for the community by the Mt Wilson Progress Association?

Response: 1: 3%, 2: 1%, 3: 8%, 4: 34%, 5: 55%

Selected comments: The MWPA is not the problem - BMCC is infuriatingly difficult to deal with. There has been a huge increase in social/community events over the last 10 years, since the reopening of the village hall. The commitment of the volunteers that have made this happen is astonishing. Very happy with all activities. A very dedicated group. Are happy with what they are doing as long as they don't get too progressive. MWPA is proactive especially in dealing with BMCC and organising events such as Remembrance Day. Great to have consistent voice interacting with BMCC and working in the community. The Progress Association does a good job, particularly in relation to communications with the BMCC. The events it puts on also provide very good focus for the village as a community, and the meetings provide an opportunity for people to discuss problems and catch up with what's going on. The biggest problem is dealing with Council - which I think most of the Village understands. Zero. Too many city people trying to make the place into Bowral. No evidence of the work?. Limited by finance and also by the fact that a number of residents are overly opinionated and at times agitate on trivial issues.

Q16 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, what is your perception of the usefulness and effectiveness of the work done for the community by the Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine Historical Society?

Response: 1: 3%, 2: 5%, 3: 16%, 4: 37%, 5: 40%

Selected comments: Mount Wilson is an Historic Village and the Society does a fantastic job. Valuable but not very visible. I rated this 3 because, while I think that the historical society is an effective group which clearly provides a good outlet for those with an interest in history, particularly local history, I'm not sure that there is much community wide impact; after all, what are the implications of local history for the wellbeing and functioning of the community? Presumably the argument would be that it's not just an interest but also has implications for the preservation of aspects of value. However there is some problem with that argument because it may lead to pressure to preserve things or places that only have value in the eyes of some beholders. They have been really effective in raising the level of awareness of the history of the area. They also bring quite a few visitors to the Village as specialised tours and

as casual visitors especially to the Turkish Bath. If we are to increase visitor numbers, their input would be very valuable.

Q17 Are you aware that in the event of you having an accident or sudden serious illness, trained local volunteers are mobilised immediately an ambulance is called to provide First Responder assistance to you at your home?

Response: Yes— 87% No—13%

There were no comments.

Q18 Have you, or someone at your property, ever experienced First Responder assistance?

Response: Yes—25% No—75%

Selected comments: Great initiative and many thanks to these people. Mt Wilson depends on the same small group of volunteers. Twice in one week. Beth Raines deserves a medal. Very impressed with competency and dedication. This is a wonderful local service that all members of the community would want to be supported.

Q19 The Blue Mountains City Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service have the major responsibility for reducing high fuel loads on Council land and in the national parks adjoining Mt Wilson private and public property. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, how effective have the BMCC and NPWS been in achieving this role around Mt Wilson in the last 10 to 15 years?

Response: 1: 31%, 2: 31%, 3: 30%, 4: 6%, 5: 1%

Selected comments: Both obstruct winter burns and are appalling bureaucracies. There are many areas where very little has been done to reduce the fuel load caused by falling trees and shedding bark. The National Parks have done burns over the years. The BMCC has been very lacking in help to keep their areas safe. There are strict rules in how many years elapse before an area can be re-burnt. Most people would not be aware of this. Weather will always be a major factor in being able to do hazard reduction burns. Both BMCC and NPWS should be more proactive in clearing breaks around people's boundaries where they share boundaries. Residents need to be much more proactive in maintaining their own asset protection zones. Any BMCC hazard reductions are palmed off onto the local RFS volunteers! My perception is that there has not been enough done due to both funding restrictions and overly conservative attitudes to hazard reduction. Not sure if the lessons learnt from the Victorian fires have been fully appreciated. Whilst some obvious efforts from RFB, Council doesn't appear to have accepted that more clearing and buffer zones are needed. The reason that we have not lost houses to bush fires in the past was that the old settlers burnt back from the mountain every winter. This has virtually ceased and it is only a matter of time before properties are destroyed if this situation continues. Effectiveness is blunted by the stifling bureaucracy and mountainous paperwork which apparently has to be dealt with before fuel reduction burns can take place. This is just part of the "cover your ass" mentality of local government and the nanny state. The result is that not enough fuel reduction burning is carried out. This is not, however, the fault of the local brigades. Very ineffective. Dead trees lying on our fence adjoining national park. Rang Council 3 to 4 weeks ago to request it to be removed, still not removed. An absolute waste of space. Useless. Council's clearing of the sides of the fire trails is appreciated but I am not aware of NPWS doing anything.

Q20 Do you support hazard reduction burning adjacent to Mt Wilson private and public property as soon as it can be done safely in order to safeguard private and community property?

Response: Yes—97% No—3%

Selected comments: As soon as possible please. Sounds easy to say but is harder to do in reality! Much of the land around the Village is moist basalt cap, has a long recovery time, and can only be burnt every 25 years due to environmental considerations. There is also a delay in getting approvals from the bushfire management committee. Many people seem to think that having neighbouring land managers do hazard reductions absolve them of their obligations and responsibility. Only enough to provide a defensible belt, and only where no harm is done, eg where a progression to rain forest is occurring.

Q21 In return for the property rates we pay, among the direct responsibilities of the Blue Mountains City Council is maintenance of local roads, garbage collection, weed removal on Council land, and capital works or repairs for the likes of the Village Hall or the sealing of dirt roads. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is low and 5 is high, what is your rating of the value Mt Wilson receives from Council for the rates we pay?

Response: 1: 21%, 2: 36%, 3: 33%, 4: 9%, 5: 0%

Selected comments: Rates are extremely high, but corresponding Council services are extremely poor or non-existent. They would only rate a 1 if it weren't for the fact that our Progress Association organises much of the work! I am not on top of this information. I do know how useful the chipping service is and the garbage service is always reliable. I am not aware of much weed removal near my property. The roads seem to be maintained quite well. The chipping service is excellent. I believe Mt Wilson receives a lesser amount of council funds in proportion to the amount of rates we pay compared to the rest of the Blue Mts. This may be partly due to its isolation. Roads are well below standard – look at the patch up and lack of drainage on Farrer Road West – it was in better condition when my Grandfather maintained it! My guess is our rates don't cover the cost of BMCC services to Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine. However, I also think we are a Blue Mountains tourist attraction and BMCC has an interest in maintaining the villages to encourage Blue Mountains tourism. However, I think Council could use better quality workmen to do their work, since some of the work they do is pretty sloppy. The use of local contractors with MWPA acting as a local agent is a really good approach since BMCC gets good value and we get some say in the work done.

Q22 How long have you lived at Mt Wilson?

Response:

Less than a year—1%

2- 5 years—13%

5 - 10 years—16%

10 - 20 years—32%

More than 20 years—37%

Q23 What percentage of time are you resident in Mt Wilson? Response:

Less than 10%—15%

Between 10% and 25%—21%

Between 25% and 50%—12%

Between 50% and 75%—9%

More than 75%—43%

Q24 To help with understanding of the age attributes of the people of Mt Wilson, which age bracket are you in?

Response:

1 – 20 > 0%
21 – 30 >1%
31 – 40 > 4%
41 – 50 > 8%
51 – 60 > 22%
61 – 65 > 16%
66 – 70 > 17%
71 – 75 > 17%
76 + > 15%

Q25 Are you a full-time or part-time resident?

Response: Full-time 45%, Part-time 55%.

Q26 Are you employed full-time, part-time or retired?

Response: Full-time 34%, Part-time 22%, Retired 43%.