



Cartoon: Jessica Roser

The cost of a new town on our flora

EDITORIAL

By ZOE TUDOR

THE new town near North Rothbury called Huntlee is by some means the best thing that could happen for business in the Hunter Valley.

However there is one cost for this new town that can't be paid with money.

There is a plant in the North Rothbury area that is one of the top ten most endangered plants in Australia. It is called the North Rothbury persoonia.

This elusive plant is about 1- to 1.2-metres tall when fully grown. It has broad green leaves and woody branches. It has yellow flowers. There are only 350 of these plants left in the wild and it only grows in one place.

That is at the site for Huntlee.

But is it worth the fuss? Many people would say that it is just one little plant and it would send many people into financial difficulty if conservation led to the cancellation of the operation.

Even so, the Cessnock City Council has made the developers design a new town park to provide

an area where the plant can thrive. The Huntlee developers have allocated 17 hectares to Persoonia Park just for this species.

Many people agree with the council and say that, as we are losing hundreds of plant and animal species every year, we should do all that is within reason to protect a species.

It hasn't been easy though. Many thousands of dollars have been put towards protecting the species.

First there is the cost of employing people to plant and care for the Persoonia. Then there is the loss of building sites that would have given the developers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

You also need to regard the fact that the owners and developers would have had to spend precious time and money getting grants and paying conservationists to research the North Rothbury persoonia. The persoonia is not the easiest plant to grow and requires a lot of work to keep it alive when it is not in its natural area. That is because it is difficult to grow from both seed and cutting.

In Sydney at the Botanical Gardens though, lots of people think it is worth trying to grow this one species.

Huntlee soon set to be part of the Hunter

By JACOB LAMB

HUNTLEE is the first new town in the Hunter for over 50 years. A broad range of land is for sale in Huntlee's first village, Katherine's Landing.

It will have four villages surrounding a contemporary town centre.

The first stage of construction officially began on February 25, 2014.

Its future was uncertain as the plans for its development had twice been knocked back in the Land and Environment Court of NSW.

Local environmentalists had protested that the development of the site would threaten surviving pockets of the endangered species, persoonia pauciflora. However the rejection has been overturned in the NSW Court of Appeal as of December 8, 2011.

Other problems faced by developers was the investigation that found more than 500,000 cubic metres of coal waste, responsible for leaching acid into nearby Black Creek, spread across 20 hectares at the Huntlee site. The coal waste was toxic and could have threatened surface and groundwater.

Part of the North Rothbury site was home to Aryfield Colliery, closed in 1975, and later a coal washery plant and an waste dump for construction materials.

Huntlee will develop multiple educational facilities to cater for its



Katherine's Landing is taking shape.

Picture: Chloe O'Connell and Tayla Thomson

population. Both public and private schools will be in Huntlee, enabling existing Branxton, Greta and North Rothbury residents the option to avoid travelling to other towns such as Maitland and Newcastle to access high schools.

The project plan will initially create up to 5600 residential dwellings in four distinctive villages,

with planned room for population growth.

There will be a park named after an endangered plant and work will be done on Wine Country Drive for easier access.

The town is based on the "cradle to the grave" notion, with land size and facilities to cater for all stages of life.

Branxton students can see beyond borders

By INDIAH BATES and RYAN LANG

IMAGINE not having walls in your classroom. That's what some children in Cambodia experience. No walls, no books, no water and no toilets.

In term one, Branxton Public School supported the See Beyond Borders organisation. See Beyond Borders raises money to help schools in Cambodia.

Nearly half of the children in Cambodia do not complete primary school. See Beyond Borders

provides access to quality teaching and learning at school. They also build wells for fresh drinking water and toilets.

Australian volunteers have been holding workshops in Cambodia with nearly 200 Cambodian teachers attending.

Branxton Public School raised \$2082.85 by getting sponsors and running around the local oval. It was enough to buy two wells for the children and their schools. Branxton Public is proud to support such a worthwhile cause.



Proud school leaders and cross country winners with the cheque for See Beyond Borders.

Picture: Sacha Bennett and Indah Bates

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