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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

7 May 2020

# Closure of the Huonville and Geeveston Visitor Information Centres

Following an active twelve-month-long review of its visitor information services, the Huon Valley Council has made the difficult decision to close its Visitor Information Centre in Huonville and visitor information space in Geeveston.

The comprehensive review of Council's continued management and ownership of the centres showed that operating circumstances have become more challenging over the past 12 months.

At its March 2020 Special Meeting, Council resolved to continue to operate the Huonville and Geeveston Visitor Centres, with a view to move towards a cost-neutral service model for their continued operation.

"Unfortunately, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the back of the downturn following the 2019 bushfires, this was going to be a very difficult task," said Huon Valley Council Mayor Bec Enders.

A further review was undertaken to address new challenges and the rapidly changing circumstances brought about by the current health crisis. At its 29 April 2020 Ordinary Meeting, Council resolved to wind up operation of both centres due to the loss of tourism in the region and budget constraints.

"The COVID-19 Emergency will continue to have effects on visitation in the Huon Valley in the medium and long term, with limitations and restrictions on travel, public gatherings and social distancing," said Cr Enders.

"Many people have lost employment and probably won't have funds available for leisure travel for some time until the COVID-19 emergency is over. People are also likely to avoid international travel for some time.

"The decision to close the centres has come after a thorough, comprehensive review of Council's visitor information services, and was not taken lightly. The approach to supporting the visitor economy in the Huon Valley needs to be considered in the context of and in

**Communications & Media Officer**

Huon Valley Council

[communications@huonvalley.tas.gov.au](mailto:communications@huonvalley.tas.gov.au)



response to the health crisis, and unfortunately this means closing the visitor centres in Huonville and Geeveston.

“Community engagement will commence soon on re-imagining the use of the vacant spaces within the Geeveston Town Hall. We are excited about facilitating the discussion with our community about how the Geeveston Town Hall can become not only a tourist destination but also a vibrant community hub.”

Council’s decision to no longer provide visitor information centre services will ensure that we can appropriately manage Council’s budget impacts of COVID-19, and continue to deliver the services our community really needs.

“Council acknowledges that the visitor centres have provided significant value to the community, local economy and the tourism sector, with many small tourism operators and artisans having relied upon them,” said Cr Enders.

“Investment in dedicated and passionate people is a crucial part of providing and showcasing the best of what the Valley has to offer, because it means we see more people visiting the region, and more new residents joining our community.”

Cr Enders says Council remains committed to supporting the Huon Valley tourism and business community as we respond to COVID-19.

“With a renewed focus, drive and dedication to deliver on our promises, we look forward to progressing initiatives under the Huon Valley brand program.

“Council sincerely thanks each and every staff member for their dedication and passion in delivering professional and well-regarded visitor information services to our community and our visitors over the past ten years.”

**For more information: Mayor Bec Enders (03) 6264 0300**

**Communications & Media Officer**

Huon Valley Council

[communications@huonvalley.tas.gov.au](mailto:communications@huonvalley.tas.gov.au)