

**KFOA PRESENTATION TO INQUIRY & ADVISORY COMMITTEE 2  
FEBRUARY 2026  
Kingston, Friends of the Avenue Inc.**

**Western Renewables Link Project**

**2 February 2026**

Thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Julie Baulch. I am a retired teacher and farmer. I have lived on Dja Dja Warrung country for 42 years. Broomfield has been my home for 22 years and prior to that I lived in Kingston for 20 years.

As President of Kingston, Friends of the Avenue Incorporated. I am representing the KFoA, our community and the Avenue's stakeholders in particular, families connected to the Avenue and the Creswick-Smeaton RSL Sub-Branch.

I would like to introduce you to committee members who will assist me in making our presentation.

Claire Rowlands – Vice President

Leah Armstrong – Treasurer

Penny Swain – committee member

**THE AVENUE OF HONOUR** Avenue Slide

The Avenue is described in our submission, but I want to provide a quick overview because this is central to our presentation about unacceptable impact and the need for avoidance.

Kingston is surrounded by breathtaking views of the volcanic cones and subsequent plains. These rich volcanic plains provide unique land which has allowed for extensive and intensive farming over decades.

It is into this rich volcanic soil that 286 elm trees were planted in 1918/19 to commemorate the service of men and women from the district who served in the Great War are now 108 years old.

It is through this Heritage listed Avenue of Honour that Ausnet proposes to transport hundreds of concrete trucks and other heavy vehicles per week!

Our Avenue of Honour combines remembrance, landscape and community memory in a way that is different to a stone monument, like a Shrine of Remembrance. It is a living memorial.

Each tree represents a named person from our community and commemorates their service in the Great War.

It is an unusually long Avenue with an exceptionally spacious road easement and a wide spacing of the trees.

**AVENUE SLIDE 2** (Note: Slide 6, used again later)

The Avenue is experienced sequentially whether you are walking or driving. The memorial creates a story through **repetition and rhythm** because when you move through the Avenue in the landscape, it reminds you how many people it represents. The sequential experience is something that visitors always comment on. That repetition and rhythm is important and if it is affected or altered in anyway, it would change the experience.

Our Avenue reflects part of the story of Australian war participation – the rural and regional side of that story. It is evidence of how our community processed grief and pride after the First World War.

Unlike many Avenues, our Avenue is intact and carefully managed by KFoA and the Hepburn Shire Council. A mature collection of Elm trees such as this is now globally very rare due to the impact of Dutch Elm disease. The Avenue trees and township trees are inoculated every two years for elm leaf beetle. This process is undertaken by Hepburn Shire Council.

**SLIDE Norman Family**

Maintenance is an act of respect by our community. We do not want to lose trees because that is a loss of memory for our community. When trees do reach their Useful Life Expectancy they are replaced quickly. We have replaced 20 trees to date.

**SLIDE Norman Family 2**

Where possible we involve relatives in the process. The replacement of Clarence Albert Norman's tree in 2024 was the first time in years that the family had been reunited for something other than a funeral!

Our Avenue is valued not just for the trees. It is also valued for the broader rural landscape setting in which it sits, supporting the dignity of the place.

The Avenue is on the Victorian Heritage Register.

## SLIDE Heritage Overlay

This Register is to identify, protect, and manage Victoria's most important cultural heritage places and objects—the things that are considered to have State-level heritage significance. In plain terms, it's Victoria's official list of places that matter.

You will note that the Register identifies that the Avenue has cultural, historic, social and aesthetic significance. To quote '*... The planting of ... 286 trees ... on both sides of the road produces a dramatic and continuous avenue, which contrasts markedly with the pastoral surroundings. The avenue is an impressive and imposing visual and cultural landmark and a key landscape feature of the district.*'  
[Criterion E]

## Avenue Slide 2 (Slide 6, used for second time)

In 1918, Kingston was selected as the location for the 'Creswick Shire Avenue of Honor' because it was the geographical and administrative centre of the region.

The hamlets of Allendale, Blampied, Broomfield, Cabbage Tree, Campbelltown, Creswick North, Dean, Glengower, Kangaroo Hills, Kingston, Kooroocheang, Lawrence, Mollonghip, Moorookyle, Mount Prospect, Newlyn, Newlyn North, Rocklyn, Smeaton, Springmount, Sulky, Ullina, and Wattle Flat made up the Creswick Shire and were represented in organising the planting.

These are the hamlets that are represented by the Kingston and District Power Alliance to oppose the proposed WRL Project 108 years later.

The first planting took place on 10 August 1918, just four months after their initial meeting to discuss the proposal. 225 trees were planted by the local community in one day. Over the following year further plantings took the Avenue to 286 trees, at which point they reached the Midland Highway.

The Avenue trees are predominantly Dutch Elms. Apart from replacing 20 trees, the Avenue is still intact, retaining 266 original trees. The elms within the Kingston township are not part of the Avenue itself. They were planted by the school community in 1919 but continue the sequential experience from the Avenue. The township trees have a Hepburn Shire Council overlay.

The Avenue of Honour starts at Victoria Road on the edge of Kingston and runs approximately 2.9 km south down Kingston Road towards the Midland Highway.

We really hope that the Committee will tour the Avenue when you come for site inspections. It is a compelling part of the landscape of the Hepburn Shire. For you to fully understand ‘the place’, you must experience it first-hand.

## **Position Slide**

### FRIENDS’ POSITION ON WRL

In summary:

- We oppose the overhead transmission proposal for the reasons that have been emphasised in the submission of the Hepburn Shire and others.
- We request that the Committee recommend that the proposal is rejected.

This presentation is a team effort involving the Friends of the Avenue committee members.

We are going to cover the impacts on the Avenue and the surrounding area in this presentation.

We are disappointed that the EES:

- did not refer to the Avenue of Honour in Chapter 10 Historic Heritage
- did not consider Environment Performance Requirements in regard to using Kingston Road and the Avenue of Honour in the Proposed Project

## SUPPORT FOR OTHER SUBMISSIONS **SLIDE**

Kingston Friends of the Avenue supports the Hepburn Shire submission. The Avenue’s land is owned by the Hepburn Shire. We have a strong working relationship with the Hepburn Shire and their Senior Arborist, Matthew Daniel.

We also support the submission from the Daylesford Macedon Ranges Tourism Board – now called *Destination Central Victoria*. We are members of Destination Central Victoria.

We agree with the Hepburn Shire and Destination Central Victoria that the transmission lines have too many unacceptable impacts in Hepburn that can't be avoided or mitigated. We agree that the transmission lines should be underground through Hepburn.

We also support the submissions made by Kingston District Power Alliance, the Victorian Farmers Federation and several other community groups such as:

- Blampied - Kooroocheang Landcare
- Bald Hills – Creswick Landcare
- Kingston Agricultural Society

## FRIENDS OF THE AVENUE – WHO WE ARE + WHAT WE DO **Anzac Service SLIDE**

First, it is important to mention that before the Friends of the Avenue was established there was a long period when the Avenue was neglected and suffered damage.

Power and water infrastructure was installed, without any consideration for the impact on the Avenue. This damaged the tree roots and created an opportunity for elm suckers to take hold.

The state of the Avenue caused significant pain to veterans living in our community.

In 1998 the Kingston Friends of the Avenue group was formed as a response to that concern. I was a founding member and chairperson of this initial group and became president when we incorporated in 2013.

Volunteers stepped in and a huge amount of community work has been done since then to bring the Avenue back to the magnificent place that it is today.

Our community continues to invest significant time and effort into the Avenue because this is an important place. It is a gathering place for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day commemorative services. It matters to our community.

There is a fierce sense of community ownership of the Avenue. As well as it being a beautiful place, it holds great significance for families who have relatives commemorated there. It is also a legacy of the vision of the

community who planted the Avenue in 1918 as a place to grieve and honour those who served.

This is a place that means a great deal to our community and it is a source of pride. As one example of the genuine respect and affection shown towards the Avenue by local people, I refer you to the attached short note we recently received from a contractor:

*“My name is Nisbet Marshall of Small Plant Hire we are based in Broomfield, we were contracted to slash the grass in the Avenue. I have tried to do the best I can treating each tree and name with respect. I did notice today when almost finished that the 4<sup>th</sup> tree on the left closest to the highway one of the sisters bow had fell off I have tucked it into her name plate but needs a permanent fix”.*

The Avenue connects the present to the past. You can view short films at our website [kingstonfriendsoftheavenue.org.au](http://kingstonfriendsoftheavenue.org.au).

I refer you to Lucas Duffy’s Anzac Day Speech, and the powerful interviews within ‘trailer final’.

## PURPOSE OF FRIENDS – PRESERVE & PROTECT

The purpose of the Friends of the Avenue ‘*to preserve and protect the TREES and HISTORY of the former Shire of Creswick Avenue of Honour, at Kingston*’.

We have been very successful in delivering on our goals and objectives over a long period of time.

### CFA SLIDE

We have very strong community support and a large group of volunteers who help in numerous ways, including working bees prior to our Commemorative Services and helping at our fund raising bunnings BBQ s where we team with the Kingston Agricultural Society raising approximately \$4,000 per year.

We are about to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding with Hepburn Shire which sets up a more formal arrangement for us to work together. We will continue to meet quarterly.

Our Strategic Plan identifies two themes of indicators of our work being successful.

- First, '*a magnificent Avenue*'; and
- Second, '*carrying the torch*'.

### CENTENARY SLIDE 1

Both of these elements were evident at our Centenary Event which was celebrated in 2018, being the Centenary of the first planting of the Avenue, and the Centenary of the Armistice. We shared our magnificent Avenue with thousands of visitors from throughout Victoria and interstate, sharing stories of the people and the Avenue, and keeping history alive through demonstrations of lost trades, and participation in historical games.

### CENTENARY SLIDE 2

The Committee has set our goals and objectives into the future.

As a Committee, we are focused on making sure the necessary resources are in place to protect the Avenue for the long term, including its trees and infrastructure, like the cenotaph, flagpole, names plaques; and the Kingston Remembers Resource Centre, housed at the Commercial at Kingston Hotel.

We have a Conservation Management Plan which is currently being prepared in consultation with Hepburn Shire and arborist. This is a strategic report which is intended to ensure we have 'a magnificent Avenue' into the future.

We take expert advice from Homewood Consulting who are qualified arboriculture consultants providing expert advice on the management of trees in the landscape. I will reference their advice later in my presentation.

We have active working groups on the Committee.

We are registered as with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission. We present an Annual Report at our AGM. Business, Governance and Partnerships working group has developed policies and continues to successfully apply for grants, receiving \$78,000 in the past three years to care for the trees in the Avenue. Tree Management involves working closely with Hepburn Shire Council through our quarterly meetings. Our work has been referred to above.

We create strong community relationships through our Communication and Community Engagement group. As well as our relationship with the local Creswick Smeaton RSL sub-branch, we have a close relationship with

Newlyn Primary School. The primary school children participate in our Remembrance Day ceremonies.

Through our History, Heritage and Tourism sub-committee we are members of Destination Central Victoria. We work with them to take advice on tourism strategies.

We also have a working arrangement with Federation University which focuses on opportunities to link third year students with community groups to preserve local history. We have proposed that students could develop a War Heritage Self-Drive Tour through the Hepburn Shire which links back to Destination Central Victoria priorities.

## KEY ISSUES **SLIDE**

For the Kingston, Friends of the Avenue, the key issues are:

- Failed consultation
- Impacts on the trees and roadside in the Avenue
- Transport impacts
- Safety impacts for visitors and volunteers
- Tourism impacts

## FAILED CONSULTATION **SLIDE**

Failed consultation: We made a concerted effort to inform the community about engaging with the consultative process. We promoted WRL & AusNet events, plus various community groups held events to help spread the word about the process, and to help people respond. Despite there being numerous pins placed on the Avenue, not once was I or anyone involved with the Avenue contacted. The Avenue website was linked in the pins, so it would have been easy for AusNet to reach out.

## PINS **SLIDE**

This is what some of the PINS said:

*The Kingston Avenue of Honour is an important historical site. It would be insulting in the extreme to have the proposed power lines anywhere near this site.*

*One of the most intact and scenic groves of trees anywhere in Australia, looked after by a enthusiastic and committed group of Friends. To despoil the Avenue with huge, ugly power pylons would be vandalism.*

*Highly valued and appreciated Avenue of Honour...built to honour sacrifice and with a long-term vision....*

*This site holds great significance to the local community & to the descendants of those commemorated by this Avenue of Honour.*

*The Avenue is very important to the descendants who live in the surrounding areas.*

## IMPACTS ON THE TREES AND ROADSIDE IN THE AVENUE

You will have read the expert advice of Homewood Consulting in our submission Appendix 5.

I would like to take this opportunity to read part of it to you since it highlights the sensitivities for the Avenue.

*'In order to protect the trees and avoid impact from the proposed use of the road for the WRL project, it is imperative that the existing grassed road verge is retained intact along the length of the Avenue. This means the road should not be altered (widened) .... Parking of heavy vehicles must be avoided on the road verge to prevent damage to the trees from soil compaction.'*

## TRANSPORT IMPACTS

We are concerned that the Project intends to use the Avenue of Honour as a major haulage route to access the corridor during construction and into the future.

The story of an Avenue of Honour comes from visual continuity and the repetition and rhythm that creates a roll call effect for the person walking or driving through the Avenue. The Avenue has minimal road signage which contributes to the experience.

Although Kingston Road is rated for heavy vehicles, currently not many heavy vehicles use the road.

A few trucks a day is not a major concern, but the number of trucks proposed by AusNet would drastically change the Avenue and the experience.

Currently, the Avenue is a formal, dignified corridor and the change to an industrial roadway is not compatible with the respect the community expects for this place. The overall memorial, heritage and tourism experience would be degraded by heavy industrial traffic.

### Brinsden Centenary SLIDE

Generations of relatives of Gilbert Joseph Brinsden met in the Avenue for the Centenary of his death in the Great War. Gilbert's family read excerpts from his letters sharing his hope for a future with peaceful resolution to conflict rather than the horrors of war. They sang hymns and performed a beautiful service to honour Gilbert's memory and sacrifice. The psychological impact and potential safety impact of numerous large trucks during this service would have been devastating.

As mentioned in our written submission these are possible effects from heavy vehicles:

*The following effects lead to reduced tree health, shortened life span and diminished aesthetic and environmental effects.*

- *accidental use of the verge, compaction leads to root damage*
- *root damage leads to suckering*
- *road and edges disintegrating*
- *use of Alcorns Road as a turning point*
- *increased maintenance costs for Hepburn Shire Council*
- *traffic disrupts wind flow, trucks cause wind turbulence. This could result in sprayed farm chemicals being funnelled into the Avenue*
- *physical damage to tree canopies or infrastructure*
- *dust on leaves reduces photosynthesis*
- *introduction of pathogens from other areas is a serious concern*
- *air and soil pollution*
- *altered microclimates*
- *other*

The website below was used to inform our concerns detailed above.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=effects+pf+heavy+traffic+on+street+trees&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-au&client=safari>

**NO STOPPING:** We are also concerned about the risk that vehicles will try to use the Avenue as a place to pull over.

The edges of the road are soft. Heavy vehicles cannot drive off the roadside without damaging the roots of the elms.

The idea of these vehicles using the Avenue is poorly considered because it will be difficult to police this.

We don't want to need bollards and signs placed all along the edge of the Avenue to keep vehicles off the roadside.

That would change the whole appearance of the Avenue and would be an unacceptable outcome.

**DUST, NOISE AND VIBRATION:** There is no report from AusNet on how dust and vibration would impact tree health and longevity in the Avenue.

We are concerned about vibration and soil compaction and dust contamination affecting tree health and longevity. I would suggest that the Panel visit the Bacchus Marsh Avenue of Honour website to reference the advice they have received regarding protections for their Avenue.

<https://www.bacchusmarsh.avenueofhonour.org.au>

Currently the Avenue is a quiet place, emphasising its sanctity. The noise of heavy vehicles would degrade the experience.

**O'Connor SLIDE**

### **SAFETY IMPACTS FOR VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS**

Using the Avenue for numerous large vehicles would certainly impact the potential for families to safely visit their relative's tree, which would be a devastating change.

People travel far and wide to visit the Avenue. As referred to in my submission, one example is the Davies family travelled from Queensland and northern New South Wales to join their Victorian relatives in 2023 to visit their relatives' tree and visit the old homestead site and cemetery at Smeaton. Imagine their dismay if they arrived to find concrete trucks and haulage vehicles moving through this revered place.

Another example is the O'Connor family meet every year to visit the O'Connor tree and honour their relative.

We have real concerns for the safety of volunteers in the Avenue. You will find that there is none or minimal rubbish in the Avenue. If rubbish is noticed, people generally stop to pick it up. How would this work with heavy vehicles travelling through constantly?

## TOURISM IMPACTS

The Avenue is an example of how the impact of the proposed transmission lines would extend beyond the corridor because it impacts heritage and tourism.

Kingston is about 20 km from Daylesford and about 25 minutes from Ballarat.

This makes the Avenue an easy side-trip or stopover on a drive through the Central Highlands. It is a gateway or connective route.

We believe that there will be a tourism impact, even though much of the Avenue would not have transmission lines visible.

We share the concerns raised by Hepburn Shire and Destination Central Victoria about the tourism impact and what that means for the economic impact for the region. We agree with the concerns that have been raised by Hepburn's tourism operators, like Quirindi Stables, Captains Creek and the Maze House. We do not see any basis for AusNet to claim that the visitor experience is only impacted within 2km of the corridor. The various tourism experiences are interconnected and the journey between places is important.

We believe that transmission lines would degrade the visitor experience across multiple places which would affect where people go in the region and affect whether they recommend the region to others.

The risk is that if transmission lines are built at the northern end of Kingston Road, through the Buried Rivers of Gold, over historic Kerrins Bridge and around Hepburn Lagoon, it would have a permanent and adverse impact on decision making by visitors. It would undermine the attractiveness of the Avenue of Honour as a place for visitors to include in their journey.

### TOWERS Slide

In addition, there's also the transmission lines on Birch's Bald Hill which have been mentioned by the Shire of Hepburn's visual expert. If the Committee comes to the Avenue of Honour, you will see that there are various locations on the Avenue of Honour (and through the village of Kingston) where the transmission lines on Birch's Bald Hill would be in full view.

Birch's Bald Hill is only 4.5km from Kingston. We have provided a mock up of how towers may appear from one of the affected locations on the Avenue, near the cenotaph, where we hold our Anzac Day and Remembrance Day Services.

Our concern is that visitors will plan their journey to completely avoid the area that's heavily impacted by transmission lines and there's a high risk that visitors will decide to skip the Avenue of Honour completely because it would be the gateway to an area with negative visual appeal.

We are members of Destination Central Victoria. We've had discussions with them about how the Avenue fits into their regional tourism strategy. They have a strategy to encourage visitors to explore villages and local communities on the fringe of the main Daylesford-Hepburn Springs circuit to spread the visitors through the whole region, rather than just staying in Daylesford. The strategy is designed to encourage visitors to spend longer in the region. When people stay longer and get out into the smaller villages, their presence provides an economic advantage for our region.

For example, Destination Central Victoria has developed a two-day tour through Smeaton, Blampied and Kingston. This tour is aimed at visitors who are interested in a mix, centred around scenic slow travel through a beautiful landscape with rolling farmland, volcanic cones and historic sites. Destination Central Victoria included the Avenue of Honour in that tour to add a different dimension for the visitor.

Nobody would be interested in that particular tour if transmission lines are built through this area.

The tour can be found at the following link:

<https://daylesfordmacedonlife.com.au/itinerary/explore-blampied-smeaton-kingston/>

If towers are constructed, we understand tourists will see between 40 to 60 transmission towers if they travel on this suggested tourism route - which has been described as a tour through beautiful countryside, including the Avenue of Honour. The towers would be visible for miles and would fundamentally change their enjoyment of the journey.

This would have significant knock-on effects on tourism - visitors who come through the Avenue are often on their way to nearby places, including:

- The Commercial Hotel in Kingston, which hosts our ‘Kingston Remembers Resource Centre’
- Buried Rivers of Gold tour
- RACV Goldfields Resort or B&B Accommodation
- Andersons Mill and Tuki Trout Farm in Smeaton
- Maze House in Newlyn
- Quirindi Stables in Mount Prospect
- Captains Creek in Blampied
- Swiss Mountain Hotel in Blampied
- Kingston Show and the Kingston Food & Wine Festival
- Daylesford, Clunes, Creswick, Castlemaine, Ballarat etc

The transmission lines would have cumulative impacts on numerous different visitor experiences, including the Avenue of Honour.

**BURIED RIVERS OF GOLD:** We are concerned about the tourism impact on the nearby Buried Rivers of Gold self-guided tour. Visitors to the Avenue often also travel through the Buried Rivers of Gold. We are concerned about the impact on that heritage site, and we understand that the Buried Rivers of Gold tour will be removed from the UNESCO World Heritage Bid if Western Renewables Links towers are constructed through the Buried Rivers of Gold area. We support the submission by Kingston & District Power Alliance on the impact on the historic heritage of that special place.

**BULLAROOK STREAMSIDE RESERVE:** We are also concerned about the impact on Bullarook Creek Streamside Reserve, particularly in relation to vegetation (including the Victorian Tree of the Year 2025, the Algerian Oak), heritage and wildlife.

On our website, we have a page dedicated to significant trees in Kingston, which includes the copse of old trees at Kerrins Bridge and the Algerian Oak: <https://kingstonavenueofhonour.org.au/significant-trees/>

## REQUESTS **SLIDE**

Kingston, Friends of the Avenue Inc. makes the following requests of the Panel:

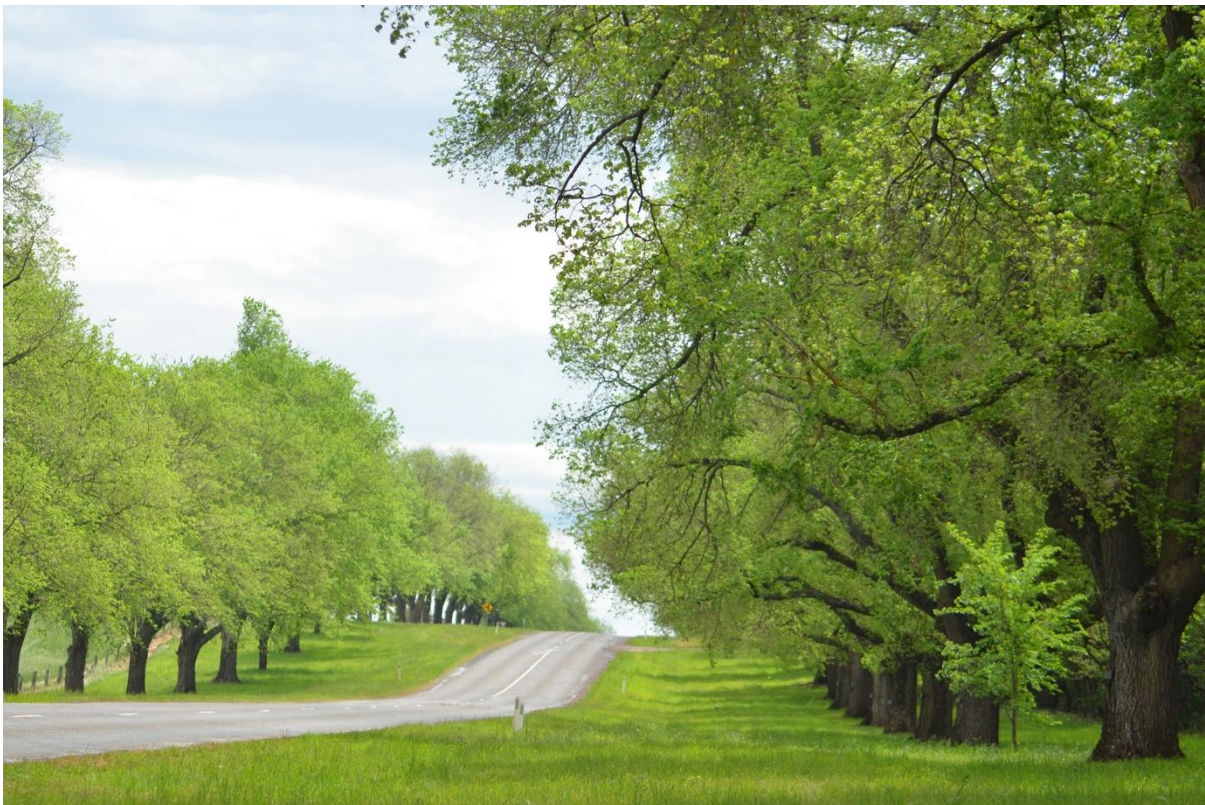
- We request that the current proposal be rejected, and a new proposal created with proper planning and consultation.
- We request that a full investigation into the impacts on the Avenue are undertaken by fully qualified arborists.
- We request that Heritage Victoria, the Hepburn Shire Council and Kingston, Friends of the Avenue Inc. are to be part of this investigation, and part of any mitigation proposals.
- We request that if the project goes ahead, the Avenue will be avoided for its protection, including by construction vehicles.

**Avenue Spring SLIDE – NOTE: Please see text below the following photographs for contact information for our group**

The Avenue is very special in all seasons:

- peaceful and shady despite the harsh climate of summer
- autumnal beauty
- hauntingly magnificent in the winter fog
- the renewal of spring

It is loved and honoured by all.



The Kingston Avenue of Honour in early summer (photo by Leah Armstrong)



The Kingston Avenue of Honour in Autumn (photo by Leah Armstrong)



The Kingston Avenue of Honour in the fog (photo by Leah Armstrong)



The Kingston Avenue of Honour in early spring (photo by Leah Armstrong)

**Presented on behalf of:**

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ACNC Charity Register – Kingston, Friends of the Avenue Incorporated:  
<https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/29ebacdc-f351-ee11-be6f-00224893b304/profile>