



Shannon Bennett demonstrates how to recreate the Chocolate Bar

News

Celebrity chef Shannon Bennett's Burnham Beeches venture becomes money black hole

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CELEBRITY chef Shannon Bennett's luxury hotel and restaurant in the Dandenong Ranges has turned into a kitchen nightmare.

Bennett and his business partner Adam Garrison's planned \$35 million redevelopment has been stalled in red tape and local objections.

Repairs to the historic three-storey art deco mansion have so far cost \$2.3 million just to keep it standing after vandals damaged the property.

'OUTRAGEOUS RUMOURS' ADDRESSED AT BURNHAM BEECHES MEETING

Now the *MasterChef* mentor hopes that work will be underway within six months after changing the plans to get council planning approvals.

"We got given some bad advice," he said. "But I feel like there is light at the end of the tunnel," Mr Bennett said.

"A lot of locals have been very supportive but there's a tiny minority with a very loud voice and specific agenda that can be extremely selfish.



 Chef Shannon Bennett wants to turn historic Dandenongs hotel, Burnham Beeches into a sustainable farm-garden.

"But we've got 99.7 per cent support from locals."

The pair had planned to put cabins on the site but scaled back on the plans after objections.

They have now focused on a refurbishment of the art deco Burnham Beeches mansion on the site to turn it into a 48-room luxury hotel.

But Mr Garrison said if work doesn't start soon, the mansion will fall beyond repair.

CHEF'S BIG PLANS FOR BURNHAM BEECHES

CELEBRITY CHEF SERVES UP NEW HOTEL PLANS

'We can't suffer any more delays,' he said. 'It's been a very long process. Now it's had vandals in it and the roof's gone. We're pouring money into it and we can't keep doing it.'

Mr Garrison, who is noted for rescuing and redeveloping neglected significant buildings such as Melbourne's GPO, said he wanted to the community to know how passionate he and Mr Bennett were about the project.



📷 Celeb chef Shannon Bennett with business partner Adam Garrison.

The pair has been on something of a charm offensive with locals, spending up to five days a week on-site speaking to residents directly to help allay fears, including traffic and fire safety concerns.

Since 2009, only the cafe and bakery, opened in 2014, have been realised on the site.

"There is a bit of a misunderstanding among people what our intentions are," Mr Garrison said.

“If we were in this to make money, Shannon and I could’ve found something in the city and turned it over three times by now.

“I’ve got better things to do really than drive up there several times a week — and so’s he — and have people abuse us, which has happened at a couple of the meetings. We don’t need it.”

Set in Sherbrooke Forest in the Dandenong Ranges about 40km east of Melbourne, Burnham Beeches was built in the 1930s by the Nicholas family of Aspro fame.



📷 Chef Shannon Bennett at Burnham Beeches with truffle dog MJ.

Over the years, it has been a children’s hospital and a research facility, but has remained vacant since 1991.

With the Piggery cafe open, the grand plan for a six-star hotel and spa centre, a Japanese-style steakhouse and a microbrewery, as well as staff accommodation, remains.

Original plans for 68 privately-owned cabins and an outdoor cinema have been scrapped as a result of community objections. Locals were concerned about the increase in people and noise in the Dandenongs, especially during the summer fire season.

But Mr Garrison argues that for the hotel to be viable, the property must contain other uses.

“Some people have said, ‘We bought here 10 years ago, we don’t want tourists’, but it’s been zoned for tourism for 35 years,” he said.

“People forget it’s not public land ... There are some people who naturally don’t like change.

There’s a small minority who don’t want to see anything happen ... We want to be part of the community and create jobs.”



📷 The Burnham Beeches site.

He said the only new building on the 22ha site was a 278sq m building for a microbrewery, which is about the size of an average house, and two smaller buildings “about the size of a hotel suite” for staff accommodation.

He was now finalising “detailed, comprehensive and costly” reports to submit to council in the next month, in what he hopes to be the final hurdle so work can commence late this year or early 2018.

Reports will address concerns such traffic and fire safety.

CELEB CHEF ACCUSES COUNCILLORS OF STIFLING 'VISION OF PASSION'

Ali Wastie, Yarra Ranges Council director of social and economic development, said the council would consider the applicant’s additional information in response to submissions received

during community consultation. The matter was likely to go to a council meeting later this year.

In September, Mr Bennett sold a majority stake in his hospitality empire to Singapore's wealthiest family for nearly \$15 million. The deal took in his flagship fine-diner Vue De Monde and the Burnham Beeches redevelopment project.

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