BHP job losses hit hard

Heather McNeill

The impact of 170 BHP Billiton job losses in Newman four months ago is starting to hit businesses hard, with consum- er confidence down and some companies forced out of town.

But Shire of East Pilbara chief executive Allen Cooper is confident plans to develop a new mixed business district would provide community morale and help diversify the town’s economy.

He also flagged building in- tegration zones with workers’ villages as another opportuni- ty that could benefit local busi- nesses.

“A lot of businesses are down 30 to 40 per cent on the last cou- ple of years but the last couple of years were way up there, so it’s just a matter of adjusting,” Mr Cooper said.

“The next push for us and for the town is encouraging small business and having land available is the first step to- wards that.”

Mr Cooper said land sub-di- vision and utility connection works had commenced in an area earmarked for a future business precinct.

“If we get ten businesses with five employees each who have families, we’ve already covered the (BHP residential) jobs loss,” he said.

“It gives more diversity to the town rather than relying on the mine organ.”

Newman Chamber of Com- merce and Industry representa- tive Sally Shone said the BHP redundancies came as a shock to many in the town who thought their jobs were safe, with contractors historically the first to go during a down- turn.

She said since the redundan- cies, about 30 more families had voluntarily left town.

“That’s 200 families that are gone — that’s a husband and a wife that have left their jobs, plus kids that have left the school — so it’s a lot of com- munity that has been lost, it’s really sad,” Ms Shone said.

BHP Billiton said the redundan- cies were part of a produc- tivity agenda to ensure the iron ore giant remained com- petitive.

It said a small number of the 170 employees had been redeployed to other opportu- nities.

School’s repair bill could run into the millions

Ben Leahy and Alex Massey

Newman Senior High School students will spend the rest of this year studying in substi- tution classrooms after the com- munity counts the cost of a fire that has shut down the second- ary college until 2015.

The Department of Educa- tion estimated the fire’s dam- age bill to be more than $4 mil- lion, after eight classrooms were gutted by the blaze, which broke out just after 1pm last Wednesday.

The bulk of the damage oc- curred in maths and science classrooms in the school’s western wing.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services and WA Arson Squad detectives have begun investigating the blaze.

The fire has shocked New- man residents, coming just weeks before Year 11 students were due to sit their critical end of year exams.

Education staff spent a fran- tic few days preparing substi- tution classrooms at the Pilbara Institute’s Newman campus to enable Year 11 students to re- sume their studies on Monday.

Year 8, 9 and 10 students also resumed classes on Monday at specially prepared classrooms at Newman Primary School, while South Newman Primary School’s repair bill could run into the millions.

The fire goes from smoke to racing flames within half an hour.

Smoke was sighted rising from within the Newman school.

She said authorities hosed the school down throughout the night and into the next day.

Residents from across the Pilbara have been quick to show their support for the em- battled school.

Karratha Senior High School principal Greg Kelly said he posted science and mathematics textbooks to Newman on Monday along with equipment, such as Bunsen burners and beakers.

“Obviously, it’s a significant interruption … (for) the school and anything we can do to help provide support … we are happy to do that,” he said.

Damage from the fire is expected to cost millions. Pictures: Glenda Jackson

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