

CITY of Greater Bendigo Mayor Kevin Gibbins has denied his personal views on the future of Fortuna Villa have quashed the vision of a local community group.

Councillor Gibbins yesterday reiterated his belief that the best use for the former property of mining magnate George Lansell is to address local concerns regarding aged care, dementia, disabilities and carers in need of respite.

The Villa Fortuna Action Group is the only organisation to have publicly put forward a vision for the historic site.

The group wishes to transform the property into an arts and cultural precinct similar to renowned tourist attraction Abbotsford Convent in Melbourne.

Cr Gibbins yesterday emphasised his views regarding the site were personal, and did not in any way represent council policy.

"My own view is about using it for people with special needs. I'm just concerned that in the future we are going to have to address all these things somehow, and at the end of the day we won't be able to afford it," he said.

"Here we have a building, a big building on 16 acres. I think it would be difficult for us to find something like it again or fund something new.

"I'm just trying to highlight the fact we have other needs."

Cr Gibbins has grave concerns about council's ability to finance maintenance at the Chum Street address, even if it isn't required to purchase the property.

He would also prefer Bendigo's existing arts and cultural precinct vision be realised before any new similar ventures are started.

"Giving a lot of reasonable thought about it, if we brought it or were given it, we wouldn't be able to maintain it.

"As well, I think it's quite difficult seeing how we can justify using ratepayers' money for art.

"We've got a masterplan for the art gallery, the whole development is happening at the art gallery complex and I've got no idea when that's going to be achieved. But a huge amount of money is involved and it will have to be done in different stages.

"How can we do that at Fortuna when we've got this masterplan?"

Villa Fortuna Action Group president Merle Hall said the group looked forward to presenting its vision to newly elected councillors.