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Community participation and decision making

“Samford Valley has a long and proud history of ‘future making rather than future waiting’.”

6.1 History and background

Samford Valley has a long and proud history of ‘future making rather than future waiting’ through strong community collaboration and advocacy. The Samford Futures process that resulted in this report has been an example of this, with open and transparent communication and face-to-face decision making being a major feature.

The community has been collaborative, yet assertive, in its relationships with all levels of government, but has not always enjoyed positive outcomes from government decisions.

The Samford Futures process included a survey of community opinion and aspiration, which was an example of a systematic and open process of community engagement and decision making that embraced all who have a stake in the community.

6.2 Existing framework

Various community groups and networks have developed their own processes for engagement and decision making with their stakeholders.

This is demonstrated through the activity of sporting and recreation groups, arts groups, service clubs, business organisations, schools, environment groups and many other community organisations and networks, which all contribute to the quality of community participation and decision making in Samford.

On a whole-of-community basis, the recognised form of engagement and decision making is facilitated by the Samford and District Progress and Protection Association Incorporated.

Open and transparent communication and face-to-face decision making has been a major feature of the Samford Futures process.

6.2.1 Samford and District Progress and Protection Association Inc.

The Association is the conduit for engagement and decision making with all tiers of government and with advocacy from individuals and groups in the Valley.

The Progress Association Executive is elected by the community and has a role to be both proactive and reactive regarding events, decisions and activities that affect the community.

Its monthly meetings are open to the community and the Association often advocates for change in response to community input. The Association publishes a fortnightly newspaper, the *Village Pump*, which plays a significant role in connecting with the community and facilitating informed decision making.

Samford has a strong community and diverse community groups. People identify with Samford as being special ... with a community minded, rural feel.



Community members at one of several public meetings in recent years

In 2007, the Association established the ViVa Samford sub-committee to facilitate major community engagement and advocacy needed to protect the Valley from an unwanted proposal to construct a large supermarket in the Village. Viva's role has since broadened during the 5 years of its existence. (Note: ViVa is an abbreviation for 'Vision for our Village and Valley'.)

6.2.2 ViVa Samford

The ViVa Samford sub-committee of the Association works very closely to ensure the expressed opinions and wishes of the community are taken into account in an open and fair way. ViVa designed and facilitated the Samford Futures process and has a strong commitment to open communication, the broadest possible engagement of the community and transparent decision making.

Its current structure consists of a Convenor, Co-convenor, General Working Group, nine Samford Futures Action Group Convenors and over 100 members of the community who are engaged in the activity of these Action Groups.



Community members involved in discussions at a neighbourhood workshop regarding the supermarket proposal

6.3 Community aspirations

The vision for how community engagement and decision making would take place in the future includes the following:

- meaningful collaboration between community and various levels of government
- endorsed process for decision forming and decision making about community directions
- people know and embrace their roles as participants
- governments and the community take the idea seriously.

6.3.1 Collaboration between community and government

There is a continuing need for government and community to engage in worthwhile ways to build a more sustainable community in Samford. Elected representatives are expected to consult deeply about the aspirations and needs of the community. Such processes should be open, inclusive and transparent. This aspiration is held very strongly by the community.

6.3.2 Process for decision making about community directions

The model adopted by the Association through its Samford Futures process focuses on the strengths of the community and this enables people to engage positively and meaningfully, knowing that their views and aspirations will be treated fairly and seriously by all engaged in the process. This philosophy should be continued because it builds optimism, energy and a sense of working together.

It also draws forward the personal energies of the community who then feel more committed to building new and better ways of doing things and on implementing them. The needs for decision making may include:

- community-generated ideas
- government-generated ideas
- enterprise-generated ideas.

The process for decision making should include a sequence of information sharing and consultation

The process for decision making should include a sequence of information sharing and consultation leading to decision making. Processes that may be useful to meet the needs identified above would include:

- quarterly forums conducted by the Progress Association, likely at a usual Association meeting, to hear and discuss any significant ideas or issues coming forward from government, community or enterprises. Advance notice of items for discussion at these Forums will be placed in the Village Pump.
- strategic planning events conducted annually or as otherwise decided as a means of tracking progress with the Samford Futures Vision and renewing it as agreed by a community engagement process
- the usual Progress Association meetings, which would be the forum for general discussion and community decision making.



This ViVa consultation process should include the setting up of Task Groups to see through the delivery of priorities identified during the process.



Café style consultations have been popular and productive

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Any decisions made during this ViVa consultation should only be made at well publicised gatherings of the community where everyone has equal opportunity to affect priority setting.
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Our vision for action

- Adopt the Samford Futures model as the foundation for ongoing engagement so that we continue to focus on the strengths of the community and builds optimism, energy and a sense of working together.
 - Use the model to involve members of the community who then feel more committed to building new and better ways of doing things and on implementing them.
 - Form decisions based on:
 - community-generated ideas
 - government-generated ideas
 - enterprise-generated ideas.
 - Adopt a sequence of engagement that focuses on information sharing and consultation leading to decision making.
- Include these following processes in decision making:
 - quarterly forums conducted by the Progress Association, likely at a usual Association meeting, to hear and discuss any significant ideas or issues coming forward from government, community or enterprises
 - strategic planning events conducted annually (or as otherwise decided) as a means of tracking progress with the Samford Futures Vision and renewing it as agreed by a community engagement process
 - the monthly Progress Association meetings, which would be the forum for general discussion and community decision making.

Everyone’s future

Want to get involved or find out more?
 Visit the website for further resources, links and updated info.

www.samfordfutures.org