

REPORT FROM GALSTON COMMUNITY FORUM

Galston RSL Club Arcadia Road

Thursday 11 April 2019, 6.30pm

Introduction

Council was represented by The Deputy Mayor Vince del Gallego and Councillors Michael Hutchence, Janelle McIntosh, Mick Marr and Warren Waddell.

Apologies were received from Mayor Philip Ruddock and Councillors Emma Heyde, Robert Browne Joseph Nicita and Nathan Tilbury.

The Forum was independently facilitated by Ms Libby Darlison from the Miller Group and the note taker was Ms Robin Miles also from the Miller Group.

Approximately 100 community members attended the Forum.

The Welcome to Country and introductions were given by Deputy Mayor Vince del Gallego. Councillor del Gallego explained that, as with the previous community forums Council has been holding, this was not a decision-making forum, rather it was an opportunity for community members to express their views on issues of concern for their community.

The Facilitator reiterated Councillor del Gallego's introduction. She acknowledged that there were some strong and divergent views in the Galston/Dural area – especially regarding the sub -division of rural lands - however she emphasised that the forum was not called only to focus only on the pros and cons of subdivision – or the future of rural lands. She explained that this forum was one of several being held across as the Shire to enable Councillors to hear and understand the range concerns of the whole community –not just the issues of concern for those in the particular ward they represent.

Councillor Waddell added to the facilitator's comments and explained that the Councillors were there to acknowledge and hear about the all of the issues in Ward A. He acknowledged that it is difficult for people to get into Council and express their views and it is also hard for community members to get their voice heard, so it is important for Councillors to hear what is important to people in this Ward (and others). *'We are here to listen and take on board the views of the community.'*

The facilitator emphasised the need for mutual respect and civility in the Forum, therefore, to ensure that as many community members as wanted to speak had the opportunity to do so, presentations would initially be limited to one minute. Once everyone who wished to speak had the opportunity to do so she would ensure that those who wanted a second opportunity to speak had that opportunity.

Key issues:

The issue which most engaged community members was the

Future of rural lands in Hornsby Shire.

Here there were two clear and opposed positions.

1. Those who wanted to retain rural lands as part of the Shire's 'green image and promotion' and who did not agree with any decision to subdivide 5 acre lots.
2. Those who felt that, for a variety of reasons, it should be possible to rezone, and to allow the subdivision of 5 acre lots.

The key arguments presented by each of these two groups were.

Pro subdivision

- Many people had lived in the Galston area for more than 20 years. They had loved living in a rural area but realised that as they grew older they could not maintain their landholdings.
- Some of those who were long term residents on 5 acre lots now had children and grandchildren. They felt that given the increase in property prices across Sydney generally – and specifically in Hornsby Shire - meant that their family could not afford to buy a home in the Shire - where they had grown up and where they wanted to remain.

This group of residents argued that if they could subdivide their 5 acres they could provide the land on which their families could build a home and still live in the Shire.

- Some residents argued that their elderly parents/ relatives etc. have lived 'in place' for many years. They had developed important relationships with friends/neighbours /Services etc. and these were the relationships they and their family wanted to maintain - and sustain - for their ageing relative(s).
- Several speakers who wanted to see subdivision allowed also wanted to emphasise that they did not want to see Galston turn into one big subdivision like Kellyville or Quakers Hill. They too wanted to retain the trees and the gardens and did not think 1 acre lots would create suburbia.

The following quotes expressed the views of many who supported the points above:

'We don't want mass sub division but we find the current situation unworkable. We have a few adult children we would love to be able to sub divide an acre or two to give to our children. We don't want mass subdivision. But we do want 1 acre.'

'I love this area and I don't want to move out. Our business is gone – we could not compete with the much bigger ones but we want to stay. The rural area is important and we can save it by reducing to 1 acre. People make beautiful gardens and they plant new trees but it is like a ghost town and I don't want to move out as I get older. We should live here in harmony – and I don't think it is right that people can tell me to move out.'

- The majority of residents who wished to see subdivision of 5 acre blocks down to one acre cited the desire to provide land for their families who could not afford to buy a home in the

Shire, or to stay close to ageing relatives so that they could 'age in place', there was a minority who explained that they had little or no superannuation and they wanted to be able to sell and have the money to retire.

They - and others – explained that 5 acre blocks were harder to sell than one acre blocks and if they were able to sell off some of their 5 acres they could still remain living in Galston with retirement funds - and their families could too. Others wanted to capitalise on an asset

'If you own 5 acres you can't just sell it and move. My generation want to stay in the area. With rezoning: 1) you can stay 2) you can get some super and 3) your kids can come and stay. We want one acre subdivision.'

'Controlled subdivision is good – the local population has increased. This is an aging area and these rural blocks are becoming an asset but we can't make any money from them.'

Anti-subdivision

The key arguments presented by those who did not wish to see rezoning for subdivision were:

- A fear that subdivision into one acre block is the 'thin edge of the wedge and will open the door to allow much smaller lots

'My huge fear is that once we get 1 acre blocks then it will would become 300sqm'

- Related to this issue was what many residents saw as the overdevelopment of Asquith and the concern that if council allowed that level of overdevelopment in that area, why would they not do so in Galston?
- Some expressed a counter view to those who said that they could no longer look after 5 acres and argued that if that is the case people should sell their 5 acres and retain the rural flavour and look of the area.

'If people can't look after their 5 acre lots they should sell them. There are plant nurseries and animal farms here - let's keep it rural forever.'

- Some speakers argued that the gardens and the nurseries in Dural/Galston bring people to the area and are a drawcard.
- In a similar vein others extended this argument to suggest that the rural nature of the area was a plus for the Shire and some thought should be given to a tourism strategy. Councillor Janelle McIntosh spoke to this issue and while not 'taking sides' suggested that Council and the community '*need to be promoting the valuable assets of our location*'. Councillor McIntosh said that she felt Hawkesbury does this really well and explained that Council is '*working on our Economic Development Plan with a focus on Tourism*'.
- There was a concern expressed that the overdevelopment and loss of amenity in terms of walkability and loss of green space that Council had allowed in Asquith, would also be allowed in Galston if the land was subdivided and that whatever happened in the rural lands

far better planning was needed or it would be again a case of ‘development being the cart before the horse.’

Two Councillors, Councillor del Gallego and Councillor Hutchence responded to the comparison with Asquith.

Councillor del Gallego said the Council has heard the issues with the roads and the community feedback about too much development. He reported the greening of Asquith through the Public Domain strategy and funded by Council.

Councillor Hutchence explained that Councillors hear the criticisms about too many apartments and high rise. The green space at Hornsby Quarry is the largest in the area. It will be embellished into key open space and will be a resource for the region. Council is also focusing on the development of other green spaces.

- In disagreement with the view that rural land in Galston was no longer productive in terms of a potential ‘food bowl’ supplying Sydney, several speakers (including Councillor Waddell who is operating an orchard in Dural and is seeking more land) argued that it is possible to operate rural businesses. One speaker noted that *‘There is a lot of local stock here, there are local chook farms, awesome vegie farms and flower shops’*
- Some community members referred to the fact that the Hills Shire had decided to cease all future subdivision.

On both sides of the argument, for or against subdivision, residents presented the view that Council needed a plan – a plan that was the result of community consultation and that would mean action. Some residents argued that the discussions that were now happening had been happening for a very long time but in their view nothing had changed.

‘I made my money in IT and I know that if you don’t plan 1 month ahead you’re dead there is no planning from this Council or the one before. We fill in surveys and then nothing happens. The average age of the people in this place is old – the statistics at Arcadia school in the last 4 years indicate that enrolments have dropped 40%. Others schools have closed and the shopping centre hasn’t changed.’¹

‘There is talk about a design led approach but you (Councillors) take what you want. Development has stopped in Cherrybrook. The whole thing is divided by Fed, State and Local government and now a ROC as well. It is no wonder nothing gets done.’

NOTE: There was some discussion about an unsigned ‘pro-subdivision’ form letter that had been circulated amongst the community. The form letter suggested that residents contact Council to allow people to subdivide. It had instructions to email one particular Councillor, (Councillor Waddell) and to ‘cc’ other Councillors.

¹ There was a difference of opinion about the ageing demographic of the area with one speaker saying he had looked up the stats and found the mean age for the for the Hornsby Dural area is 43 and that young people needed to be engaged in this discussion.

Councillor response: Councillor Waddell explained that he was completely unaware of the letter being referred to. He explained that there are many lobby groups interested in this issue – both for and against – and he is in contact with groups regularly including AGRA, Glenorie Community Association etc. – *‘I hear a lot of comments directed to me in person but there are 8-9 other Councillors and they all have an interest in this too. It is a very complex issue. There is no current consultative process for the Rural Lands consultation. The Director of Planning will take this on notice.’*

Residents agreed that no matter what position they supported regarding rezoning, circulating such a letter was inappropriate.

Subdivision/no subdivision and infrastructure

The relationship between infrastructure and subdivision was clearly a complex issue for community members. Quite a number of speakers – some of whom expressed little or no concerns about subdivision – were nevertheless concerned that there was not sufficient infrastructure to support the increased population growth that subdivision would bring. Of particular concern was traffic congestion which many forum participants noted was already a major issue for residents.

‘The major issue for me is the underlying issues with roads. It used to take 50 mins to the city now it’s an hour and half. The traffic through Dural is terrible. Council does a lot on the other side of the gorge but nothing here. There is no public transport here.’

‘This is a rural environment – once it’s all carved up that will be it. I don’t object to a second dwelling on a lot, but it brings increased traffic - all of the extra development brings extra traffic. I can’t get out of my business location for 15 minutes at peak hour due to traffic’.

‘The infrastructure here is terrible. \$10M² for New Line Road will be adding to the congestion. Everyone hates getting caught in traffic. Subdivision is not the only solution. I have kids too but I don’t think everyone having 1 acre blocks is the way to go.’

- Some residents argued that the current traffic congestion was the result of traffic from other areas coming through Dural and Galston

‘There are 32,000 car movements per day on New Line Road but the traffic is not coming from the Shire, it is not local residents. It is coming from outside the area to the M2.’

- There was a noticeable level of frustration expressed towards what residents perceived to be Council’s lack of action rezoning, historic traffic issues and other infrastructure issues.

‘I was born here and my family has lived here since 1885. We’ve been having these discussions since forever. We are the drive through detour. That bridge was built when my great grandfather had a horse and buggy.’

² The \$10m referred to is money provided to the council by the Federal Government to undertake a feasibility study for New Line Rd. Councillors explained that the Federal Government only pays for the studies to look at feasibility.

'If you want a house for your children they will have to encounter traffic congestion getting to work. I am not for or against subdivision but we need you guys [Council] to work with other government depts. to get better access and infrastructure and improve the quality of the roads etc.'

The State Government has given Council money to work on the LEPP / Rural Review what is the hold up on appointing the consultant?

Councillor Warren Waddell responded to the speaker by explaining that Council officers are keen to get this right because it is so important. They have drafted briefs and the research is expensive there is \$150K for the Rural Review. It is a hot topic and potentially divisive and it is complex. We have workshopped lots of the issues. The brief was accepted and the tenders have been called. The cut off was 3 days ago so it will be decided soon. It then has to go to Councillors for a decision.

- Some community members argued that unless more pressure was put on Council and on other levels of government, nothing would change. One speaker suggested that this was an argument for rezoning – the traffic would then become so bad and the community pressure so great that action would have to be taken.

'Council's role is to evaluate whether or not changes/rezoning/etc. are positive for society. It is no longer farming here and people are suffering on 5 acres and can't afford the basics of life. 4000sqm doesn't impact the environment. It would be better to subdivide and then fix the roads. Don't wait until the roads are fixed. We will be waiting a long time.'

- Several speakers argued that the reason that traffic was so bad was that it was coming in from surrounding areas. Others expressed frustration about the poor condition of community facilities

'My issue is how Council resources are being spent out here at the moment. The local community halls out here are poor. There has been an upgrade of the Arcadia Hall. There has been no consultation with community groups. We recommend reinstating the Halls Advisory Committee at Arcadia and take control of the local community issues and Council.'

- Councillors acknowledged this issue and gave a commitment to organising an Advisory Committee to review this situation
- Others felt that the lack of footpaths was a major issue and was a danger, especially for children

'My issue is footpaths. We would like our kids to be able to walk to their school. Here in Galston it is dangerous and there are blackberry bushes unchecked alongside the road. There are no footpaths and kids have to stand on the road from Carters Road to Old Northern Road and back to Galston. It is very dangerous.'

'I second the issue of footpaths. And we need to make them a little bit wider for cyclists. We need to be making it easier for pedestrians and cyclists and reduce car congestion. There was no reference to Western Side of the Gorge and we need to be considered.'

Councillor Warren Waddell responded: Its Council's core business to deal with the footpaths. Residential Development down at Galston Road has inhibited footpaths and other infrastructure

State Environmental Planning Policy No 5—Housing for Older People or People with a Disability (SEPP5). Councillors agreed

There was a feeling expressed by several speakers that SEPP5 was allowing ‘development by stealth’ and that Council needed to address this problem.

‘What is happening with the case of the development going to Land and Environment Court regarding the Seniors Development on Quarry Road? We believe the traffic counting is being done poorly. We need the study to be made public so they can review before the court hears the case. No emergency vehicles can access either side of Quarry Road. It is leading to increased congestion. They are measuring the traffic outside the times that are busiest.’

- Councillors agreed to make the Traffic Study public

‘Where is Council at with negotiating with the State Govt. for exemptions from the Seniors SEPP in the rural area? This makes a huge difference to traffic on Quarry Road. Has Council got any concessions from State Govt. and if so what?’

Councillor response: No exemptions have been secured there has been a letter from Dept. of Planning. There is an ageing population in Hornsby so we need to go through a process of planning for this.

‘I am concerned about the traffic. SEPP 5 developments and seniors living are putting a strain on traffic. The biggest concern is that if there is an emergency how do the emergency services get here. The traffic is so congested. It is dangerous.’

‘There was a State Government plan for roads back in 2000. New Line Road was supposed to be 4 lanes back then but it didn’t proceed. SEPP 5 developments bring cars. This area isn’t going to stay rural with SEPP 5 developments ‘they’ (developers) can make a huge of money on 5 acres.’

Councillors agreed with the views of community members regarding their concerns about SEPP5, however they explained that the SEPP for Seniors Living overrules Council Controls. Council has no role in DA’s any more. IHAP or Joint Regional Planning Panels make those decisions.

<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Housing/Housing-for-Seniors-or-People-with-a-Disability>

At the end of the Forum Councillors reinforced their commitment to continuing the community consultations and to ensuring that community members would have every opportunity to put their views forward. Council had appointed a consultancy company that would be undertaking further consultations with the community as well as additional research on future planning.