

South Alphington & Fairfield Civic Association Amcor Survey

When the potential closure of the Amcor Alphington Paper Mill was announced SAFCA called a public meeting which was held at the Alphington Primary School on 18 June 2008. The notice for this meeting had a simple questionnaire attached which asked for comments on priorities, concerns, services and infrastructure, traffic and other issues. Approximately 157 residents attended the meeting, and 89 surveys were returned. No attempt was made to encourage more returns since local concerns were clearly specified in the returns received. The Association makes no claim for the statistical validity of this survey, except as an expression of the views of concerned local residents. The results reported here from the survey mirror quite accurately the concerns expressed at the public meeting.

More than 80% of the responses thought that the site should be predominantly residential, with appropriate infrastructure such as a primary school, pre-school and kindergarten, sports and recreation facilities and public open space. Nearly half of the responses wanted low density housing to protect the environment and to preserve the beauty of the river corridor and the unique village character of the neighbourhood. Some specifically suggested that the development should not be "a mirror image of the other side of the Chandler Highway". A number mentioned a height restriction to two stories.

There was considerable opposition to high rise development, although a number of responses suggested housing for the elderly and aged care facilities and several suggested some public housing. There was no support for and considerable opposition to any industrial use of the site.

There was little interest in local shops, with less than 5% seeking strip shopping along the main road, but these suggestions were accompanied with concerns for traffic and parking, particularly in view of recent traffic deaths. Some interest was expressed in having a reduced speed limit on any roads in the site. A reasonable number of responses were concerned with the lack of public transport and bicycle access. There was virtually no interest in commercial and office accommodation, partly for access reasons. It was felt that such developments were best restricted to shopping centres closer to railway stations where appropriate infrastructure was available. Many responses mentioned the need for adequate car parking in any development. There was some limited interest in cafes and coffee shops on the site. One suggestion was a pedestrian access only local shopping area.

A large number of responses were concerned with the environment, the Yarra bank, the wetlands and the flora and fauna. A number raised the issue of a buffer zone and reiterated the need for undeveloped public passive recreation space. Similarly there was interest in a sustainable development, with water recycling, solar energy and energy efficient design, including water tanks and environmentally sustainable dwelling design. A number of responses asked for "best practice" design.

A high proportion of the responses were concerned with traffic congestion on the Chandler Highway and many suggested a duplication of the Chandler Bridge. Some noted that this would increase traffic and suggested that there should be no exits from the site onto the Chandler Highway. A reasonable number wanted a bike path

through the site which could cross the Yarra on the duplicate Chandler Bridge, have access to the Yarra shared trail and to Kew as well as to local shopping and the Alphington and Fairfield railway stations. One respondent suggested a connection from this bicycle path to the Darebin Creek path via Alphington Station to preserve the Darebin Creek junction with the Yarra and obviate the proposed pedestrian bridge from the La Trobe Golf Course. A reasonable number also wanted consideration given to pedestrian walkways and similar pedestrian access to the Alphington railway station and across the duplicated Chandler Bridge.

A small number of responses referred to the history of the site and to indigenous concerns, without making any specific suggestions except that they should be referenced somewhere on the site. The need for a community hall was mentioned in several responses. One responses suggested river access for boats and canoes.

In summary the responses showed a concern to preserve the nature of Alphington with a low-key low-rise sensitive residential development with appropriate infrastructure and community facilities, which will protect the river corridor, and provide as much community open space as possible, with pedestrian and bicycle access, and extremely careful traffic design supported by an upgrade to the Chandler Highway with a duplication of the Chandler Bridge. The unique opportunity offered by the site makes it possible to plan for a unique development which looks to the future and provides an example for others.