

REVIEW OF SIMPSON COMMUNITY PLAN – 25 July 2017

Summary

A report was provided to Council at its meeting in Simpson on 28 March 2017 outlining progress in implementation of *A Plan for Simpson: Community Priorities for Township Development 2012 – 2022*, (reference D17/185). At the halfway point in Simpson's ten-year plan several of the town's high-ranking priorities have been achieved. It was noted that this is a reflection on the outstanding capability of local individuals and community groups, and the partnerships they have forged, particularly with Corangamite Shire. This report updates that advice and reports on the review of the Simpson Community Plan.

Introduction

The Simpson Plan was initially scheduled to be reviewed in 2015-2016, but it was felt that the review would garner greater participation if it followed the community celebration of the opening of the new Simpson Community Hub. This \$564,000 project is a stand-out demonstration of what can be achieved through community planning, bringing together the resources and expertise of the local community in a partnership with those of Corangamite Shire and the Victorian Government. It provides substantiation of the value of the investment of time, effort and trust local people contributed to the community planning process. The official opening took place on 5 March 2016, in conjunction with the annual Heytesbury Show, with some 100 people in attendance.

In April 2016, news broke on the reversal of milk price payments, producing a profound shock to the local dairy farming industry, with serious impacts on farming families, agricultural enterprises and obvious flow-on effects for the whole regional economy. Farmers, peak bodies and political representatives struggled to find practical responses to what was a catastrophic development for many, producing anger, frustration and despair. This was not the best time to be asking local people to devote their energies to a review of Simpson's community plan. The review was postponed for another year to give members of the local community time to recover.

Unlike most Corangamite communities, both Simpson and Princetown do not have a 'progress association'. Historically, in smaller communities the local progress association generally only became active in response to some development opportunity, a community issue, or a crisis, so it was problematic to maintain interest in a standing organisation between such events. The community of Simpson has some robust community organisations (more than 20) and extremely capable organisers that span a range of these interests. The Simpson Football Netball Club, the Simpson Lions Club, the Simpson Cattlemans Club, the Simpson Bowls Club, the Kindergarten and Primary School Committees, the Simpson Community House, and the Heytesbury Show Society are some of the more prominent groups. This ability to come together and work towards a specific purpose is no better illustrated than in the conduct of the Simpson Rodeo over the past three years, attracting more than 3,000 people and raising substantial funds which have been used to pay down most of the Simpson community's contribution to the new Simpson Community Hub.

While this strong emphasis on practical action around a key interest is an outstanding strength for Simpson, on the other hand there is a gap in organisational capacity to bring human and financial resources to bear on those township priorities which do not readily align with an existing interest group. Community planning can help to bring people together, but can't bridge that gap entirely.

A series of meetings were held in the lead up to the public meeting held at the Simpson Community Hub on 24 April 2017 to review and re-set township priorities. These included two meetings at the Simpson Community Hub with local residents and representatives of community organisations, and a Town Walk associated with the Council meeting held at Simpson on 28 March 2017. The public meeting attracted 16 participants who voted upon the existing and new priorities. In all, an estimated 30 people took part in the review of the Simpson Plan across these four meetings, with some further contributions offered through Facebook.

Issues

Five of Simpson's 26 original (2012) priority projects have been completed, with another two programmed or commenced. Action has occurred relating to another three.

COMPLETED PROJECTS/ PROJECTS IN TRAIN

PRIORITY	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AGENCY	VOTES
1	Better town entry/ welcome signage. (Design proposal completed.)	Planning underway	30
6	Move Recreation Reserve gate to Tomahawk Creek Road. (Includes sealing of Tomahawk Creek Road)	In process	18
9	Establish fully-licensed high-quality Function Centre at Recreation Reserve to cater for up to 150 people	Completed	16
11	Build footpath from Bowls Corner to Kinder	Completed	14
11	Construct footpath from take-away shop to dam	In Shire plan	14
10	Rodeo and B&S type events for Simpson	Completed	15
24	Improve access to internet services	Completed	6

A further 10 priority projects were removed from the original list of 26 as either no longer relevant or not amenable to practical action. Several of these priorities related to private business initiatives which were seen to be beyond the influence of the local community. (The investigations into the Dirt Bike Track proposal proved abortive.)

PROPOSED OBSOLETE PROJECTS / REMOVE FROM LIST*

PRIORITY	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AGENCY	VOTES
5	Dirt bike track/ Motorbike Club		21
16	Organise media coverage on Heytesbury Settlement with website blog		9
17	Get young people involved in Simpson's future		9
18	Longer trading hours for food and fuel stops		8
19	Community Centre relocated to more central position and include tourist information/ access centre		8
20	Install zebra crossing from toilet block to ball and chain		8
21	Consolidate the housing of community organisations in combined premises/ Buy Uniting Church for community use/ More visible location		6
22	Establish Op Shop and recycling centre		6
23	Establish a sit down/ eat in Cafe/ Bakery		6
25	Better public toilets at Recreation Reserve		6

Proposals for nine (9) new priority actions were advanced and voted upon by the participants (alongside the remaining priorities from 2012) using coloured stickers to identify their top five priorities. Given that there were only half the number of participants compared to those who

voted in 2013, it was not possible to disturb the top seven surviving priorities, even though four of them received little support this time round. The revised list of Simpson priorities now contains 16 items, with a further five rounding out the voting. There are four new priorities. As noted at the meeting, any group or individual is welcome to advance any of their interests or concerns regardless of these priority rankings.

PRIORITY RANKING	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AGENCY	VOTES 2012	VOTES 2017
1	Better town entry signage/ Welcome at four entrances/exits of town highlighting services available/ Install large advertising sign to promote all functions and events/ Advertise local businesses on signboard into town / Better signage for tourist attractions/ Advertise 'Last food and fuel before 12 Apostles'	Partnership: Community/ Council/ VICROADS	30	9
2	Indoor sporting complex/ including gym, pool. (Note: Potential future Stage 2 of Community Hub)	Community	23	5
3	Make/ improve walking/ bike tracks around Simpson/ Build bush walking track through back of School	Community	17	1
4	Retain, takeover/ re-purpose Kraft Factory	Private enterprise	19	-
5	Promote gourmet food loop from Simpson end/ Promote and advertise local foods	Partnership	18	-
6	Build more/ improve footpaths/ Build footpath from Vogel's Motors to the road	Shire	14	2
7	Connect Fisher Street to <u>Murrock</u> Street as per town plans	Shire	14	3
8	Construct refuge island on the Cobden Lavers Hill Road and institute other speed restriction/ safety measures	VICROADS with Shire	-	12
9	Expand Park toilet facilities to accommodate increased tourist traffic	Shire	-	12
10	Connect to natural gas	Private enterprise	12	-
11	Advertise 'What's on at Simpson'	Community	10	5
12	More/ better street lighting (at the back of town/ central park, solar back-up)	Shire	10	3
13	Accommodation / Motel/ B& B/ Cabins/ Camping facilities/ Create caravan sites at the Football ground	Private enterprise	9	-
14	Seal <u>Murrock</u> Street to <u>Polonia</u> Road	Shire	6	1
15	Construct second entrance on Tomahawk Creek road for horse floats	Rec Reserve/ Partnership	-	6
16	Secure visiting medical services, or shuttle bus to access local medical services	State Government	-	6
	Support advocacy for 'safe driving' measures on the Great Ocean Road	Partnership	-	4
	Sand-blast and re-paint Dozer and Ball and Chain at Settlement History Reserve	Community	-	3
	Arrange for Timboon Bus to come to Simpson on a loop service	State Government	-	3
	Take steps to 'Put Simpson on the map'	Community	-	3
	Resurface netball courts at Recreation Reserve	Rec Reserve/ Partnership	-	2

Survey 2012 (N=51), Votes 2012 (N=25), Votes 2017 (N=16)

NOTE 1: Five of original 26 project priorities removed from list as completed.

NOTE 2: Ten of original 26 project priorities removed from list as no longer relevant.

NOTE 3: Four new project priorities added to form revised list of 16 current priorities.

NOTE 4: Any group or individual is welcome to take any steps they chose to advance their interests or concerns, regardless of priority rankings.

Town entry and other signage (Priority 1)

A design has been developed and quotes obtained for manufacture of CORTEN steel town entry signage on the four approaches to Simpson. The community has some Council-provided Community Plan funding reserved to finance this project, but is in need of a funding stream through which it can be leveraged. The Town Entry Signage is but one part of a larger exercise to ensure that Simpson is 'on the map', with directional and other signage pointing out services available in the town. The town's recent successful nomination as Victoria's 'Legendairy Capital' goes some way towards realising this goal (current priority 20).

Indoor sporting complex including gym and pool (Priority 2)

The planned gymnasium in the original design for the Simpson Community Hub had to be abandoned when an extra \$31K had to be found within the budget for special footings to address the 'toothpaste' ground conditions. Once the community's outstanding debt on the Hub is paid off and sufficient funds accumulated the building of a small gymnasium may be able to be revisited.

Improved walking/ bike tracks (Priority 3)

This priority survives from 2012 but is in need of the School or a community group to take it on as a project.

Retain, take-over, re-purpose Kraft Factory (Priority 4)

The Kraft Factory site has been sold by Warrnambool Cheese and Butter to a private developer and expressions of interest are being considered for the potential re-purposing of the 'Factory'. One proposal put forward speaks of the creation of 50 new jobs, but these are early days. What may have been seen by some as an improbable aspiration may turn out to be closer than imagined.

Promote food loop (Priority 5)

Some steps have been taken to promote local food offerings through the 12 Apostles Food Artisans network, its Food Trail Map and the Corangamite Shire's 2017 Calendar.

Build more footpaths and improve existing ones (Priority 6)

This priority is close to being completed. The footpath from the Bowls Corner to the Kindergarten/ School has been constructed. Some patching work was done on the gravel path to the Recreation Reserve by Community Corrections workers, but this rough path needs upgrading, and a footpath from the Takeaway Shop to the Recreation Reserve is listed in Council's forward Works program. The proposed footpath from Vogel's Motors to the road has yet to be constructed, and is an important priority (especially through winter) for those obliged to leave their car there for servicing.

Connect Fisher Street to Murrock Street (Priority 7)

This priority attracted 14 votes in 2012, but only three in 2017. It was also picked up for consideration in the Town Walk.

Traffic refuge island on Cobden Lavers Hill Road (Priority 8)

A number of people on the Town Walk and on Facebook raised issues about traffic safety and speeding through the town. Some people called for a lower speed limit and illuminated speed advisory signs, yet others condemned the idea as a 'revenue raising measure'. This priority follows on from an earlier call for a zebra crossing to be installed (priority 20, 2012), but is otherwise one of four new priorities. (It will be considered by Council and/ or referred to VicRoads.)

Expand Park toilet facilities (Priority 9)

Increased use of Simpson toilet facilities was reported, as a direct product of the unsatisfactory situation applying at the Twelve Apostles site. There was other commentary on the Town Walk about managing pedestrian and vehicular traffic in relation to the park and public toilets. This new priority arises from recent increased levels of tourist visitation.

Natural gas connection (Priority 10)

No-one applied their votes to this priority this time round, perhaps in recognition of the current impracticability of executing such a proposal, yet it was agreed to have this priority remain on the list.

'What's on in Simpson?' (Priority 11)

This was priority 14 in 2012. Locals are frustrated that the town of Simpson gets left of maps – particularly tourist maps – and would like to see action taken to recognise what the town has to offer. Some see considerable capacity to secure economic advantage from the passing tourist trade. As mentioned previously, there is presently no agency based in Simpson that has a nominated responsibility to follow up priorities such as this one, and that may be one reason why no action has been taken on it since 2012.

More/ better street lighting (Priority 12)

This outstanding item from 2012 (10 votes) attracted three votes in 2017.

Accommodation (Priority 13)

There were no votes applied to this priority in 2017, yet it was left to survive on the list, having attracted nine votes in 2012.

Seal Murrock Street to Polonia Road (Priority 14)

This proposal, originally raised in 2012, was also raised on the Town Walk, but secured only one vote this time round. It is another matter for the Shire to assess.

Second entrance on Tomahawk Creek Road (Priority 15)

This new priority (for the Recreation Reserve Committee) involves a second entrance for horse floats a little further along Tomahawk Creek Road, to manage congestion and safety concerns with traffic piling back on that road to the Cobden Lavers Hill Road.

Visiting medical services (Priority 16)

This new priority relates to the lack of available transport services, especially for older people increasingly dependent on access to health and medical services. It has implications for population retention in the small township of Simpson.

Policy and Legislative Context

The Council Plan 2017-2021 outlines Corangamite Shire's community planning initiative (Pages 10 and 11) and describes how, over the past six years, it has systematically surveyed local residents and assisted them to develop Community Plans. Recognising the many benefits of community planning and supporting its delivery, the new Council Plan includes a 'commitment to support Council's Community Planning Program' under its Theme 4 Objective to 'Engage with and listen to our communities' (Page 23), and under the Theme 1 Objective to 'Advocate strongly in relation to . . . community priorities' (Page 13).

Importantly, the Simpson Community Plan review process contributes to Council's Vision: 'We strive for a thriving and connected community' (Page 4) and gives expression to Council's Values of Respect, Innovation and Collaboration (Page 8).

Internal / External Consultation

A meeting of local residents was held at the Simpson Community Centre on 21 March 2017 where a review process and timeline was mapped out. It also served to muster interested

people to participate in the Town Walk with Councillors and Officers prior to the Council meeting on 28 March 2017. Fifteen local people assisted in compiling a combined list of mainly small infrastructure issues, many of which were able to be entered directly into Council’s CRM system as ‘work requests’. Some of the broader scale items were referred to the Plan review process.

A further Open Meeting was held at the Simpson Community Centre on 10 April 2017 with invitations sent to all local sporting clubs and community organisations. Attendance at this meeting was meagre due to power being cut off to the area for the three days prior and the need for people to attend to recovery actions. Nevertheless, a list of ‘projects to be deleted’ was compiled and some new ideas collected.

Participation in the Simpson Community Plan review was promoted through local and community organisations and Facebook networks, as well as advertised in the Cobden Timboon Coast times and The Standard. (A Corangamite Shire Facebook post drew 297 post clicks.)

A public meeting was held at the Simpson Community Hub on 24 April 2017 to review and re-set township priorities. This meeting attracted 16 participants who voted upon the existing and new priorities. In all, an estimated 30 people took part in the review of the Simpson Plan across these four meetings. (This figure might be closer to 50 if the Facebook participation is included.)

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Corangamite Shire Council

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The Simpson community are currently in the process of reviewing their ten year community plan.

Some of the priorities identified as part of this review include:

- * Construct a refuge island on the Cobden Lavers Hill Road and institute other speed restriction/safety measures in the town
- * Expand the town toilet facilities to accommodate increased tourist traffic

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Financial and Resource Implications

This report is for information only and does not entail any recommendations relating to increased or reduced financial and other resources. The provision of \$60,000 in direct seed-funding by Council has provided the impetus and the means for the local community to identify and pursue projects to strengthen the Simpson community, to build public participation in decision-making affecting Simpson's future and to improve the liveability of the township through development projects. Simpson Community Plan priorities will be considered as part of the formulation of future Council budgets or as part of Council's advocacy programs on behalf of Corangamite Shire communities.

Conclusion

The community of Simpson has made sound progress over the first five years of its 10 year community plan, with nine of original 26 priorities having been either completed or commenced, including seven of Simpson's top 12 project priorities.

Simpson has a range of very capable community organisations, characterised by self-reliance and effective leadership. While this has been a support to community planning in Simpson it has also been a challenge, in that each organisation has its own separate goals and objectives. The community planning process has been rewarding for the township in terms of progress on some major projects, yet there is potential to strengthen relationships and support between groups and to build further networks which can draw more external resources to support local initiatives. As the example of the Simpson Rodeo initiative demonstrates, there can be no questioning of local capacity to bring this about.

Much essential work on planning and financing projects remains invisible to most apart from those involved, yet is to be hoped that due recognition is given to the commitment of not only local citizens, but to Corangamite Shire, the State Government and other partners who have come together to support community priorities.

The completion of significant projects for Simpson provides unequivocal evidence of the value to communities of committing time and effort to Council's community planning initiative. This value not only relates to project outcomes for communities and for Council, but to the building of the trust which is essential to productive partnerships to enhance the liveability and prosperity of Simpson.

In common with other community plans, a key factor in the achievement of priority outcomes for Simpson has been the role played by Council in supporting the identified community aspirations, either directly, through advocacy, or through the establishment of partnerships which have contributed financial resources and expertise in project planning, design and delivery.

Source: Extract from Ordinary Council Minutes 25 July 2017