

Altona North - Brooklyn

Neighbourhood Profile





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The data profile was updated in 2015 and includes 2011 census data. Other sections in the profile have not been updated.



Altona North and Brooklyn Consultations

A. Introduction

The Altona North and Brooklyn Neighbourhood Profile is intended to provide an overview of the history and development of the area, some data about the characteristics of residents and information about the types of services and facilities that are available.

However, none of this information can describe how people feel about Altona North and Brooklyn as a place to live, visit or work. In order to gain a better understanding of these perspectives, a number of consultations took place in November and December of 2007.

At times, people who participated also shared memories of growing up in Altona North and Brooklyn. Others began their married life in the area and in some cases had lived in the area for up to 50 years. Some of these comments are included at the end of these consultation notes.

B. Methodology

Two consultation methods were used including focus groups and surveys.

A total of four focus group sessions, involving 28 participants, were held. These discussions included a range of age groups, parents and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, in order to ensure a variety of views were heard. Each focus group session lasted for approximately one hour.

The focus groups included:

- Participants in a seniors activity group
- Playgroup parents
- Secondary students from Bayside Secondary College
- English as a Second Language (ESL) students

A further group of nine ESL students provided written responses to questions used at the focus groups.

In addition, Council staff conducted short face to face survey with 25 shoppers at Altona Gate, as part of Hobsons Bay Council's mobile program. (Refer Appendix 1)

C. The Findings

The following notes, drawn from the focus groups, follow the format of the questions that were used to guide the discussion. (Refer Appendix 2)

How would you describe the Altona North and Brooklyn area?

People at the focus group sessions had a variety of views about how to describe Altona North and Brooklyn and while some spoke positively about the area and what it has to offer, others suggested it needs some attention.

Those who spoke positively about the place describe it is an affordable area to live and that it is close to the city. This view was partly supported by others who mentioned that while it was a good area to live, "it's an old area that needs a few touch ups".



On the other hand, one participant commented that “it is a poorer area” and that compared to some other areas in the municipality it is “shabby”.

Reflecting on how the area had changed since she arrived more than twenty years ago, a resident spoke about how “lots of people didn’t like it here; now it’s getting popular”. She also noted that there had been noticeable improvements to the standard of housing and the availability of shops, over that time. “The houses were old and now they’ve improved. At first, when I came here there was no shopping, no Altona Gate.”

These views were confirmed by another longer term resident who noted the following changes since coming to live in the area. “It’s changed a lot, there are a lot more houses now.”

What things make it a good place to live /work /visit?

Comments about the things that people like about Altona North and Brooklyn tended to be influenced by the age of the respondent. For example, those with younger families focussed on the affordability while younger people identified opportunities to do things they enjoyed.

Parents at a playgroup highlighted low housing costs as a major asset of the area. Most agreed that house prices are affordable, given the close proximity to the city. They also mentioned that “compared to other places on the other side of town, which are a similar distance to the city, Altona North and Brooklyn is still very affordable”.

There were, however, concerns that while housing is relatively affordable compared to other areas, the situation is changing. As one person put it “in the last 12 months, house prices have increased dramatically”. Another person who rents a house in the area confirmed these views, commenting that the rental payments have gone up, but that Altona North and Brooklyn is still much more affordable than other areas.

Apart from housing, people spoke positively about living in an area where they were close to the services they needed. This issue of accessibility was particularly important among older residents who use public transport or rely on others for car transport. Some of their comments included that it’s “very handy to all services” and “everything needed is close by”. The importance of accessibility was also important to another person who said “I can walk to all the services I need”.

For young people, accessibility was also important, although their focus was more on their social needs. Things they enjoy about living in Altona North and Brooklyn include the “places to hang out” and also living close to their friends. They also mentioned being close to the “shops and parks and the pool” as important places where they often meet up with their friends.

A number of people spoke about the availability of shopping facilities as a good feature in the area. Along with Altona Gate, smaller centres such as Borrack Square and the Circle were specifically mentioned.

Proximity to the city was identified as a positive aspect of living in the area. People who work in the city, or who have family who do, felt that this proximity was a real asset. One new arrival to Australia, and recently settled in the area, said that “living here we are close to the city. I know many Africans who live far from the city, who have problems getting there.”



People also spoke about the friendliness of Altona North and Brooklyn and that it was a safe and quiet place to live. The friendliness of people was mentioned by both new arrivals to the area and those who are long-term residents.

“The neighbours are good –I’ve known some of them a long time. They moved in around the same time. They look after the house when I’m away.”

“I am friends with my neighbours. They come from Lebanon, Burma, England and Greece.”

A person who recently arrived from overseas spoke about the benefits of living in a supportive community.

“People here are very sympathetic. Neighbours and people on the street are eager to invite you if there is a meeting somewhere. When I go to the park with my grandson, other kids become friends and they play together. We have no problems. People are approachable.”

He went on to talk about ways his family are contributing to the local community, with several of his children working as volunteers at an aged care facility.

Comments from people who participated in the surveys reiterated the friendliness of neighbourhood and the people who live there. Those who spoke about safety said they feel safe living and moving about the area. They also highlighted the affordability of housing as a positive but something they are concerned will change. As one person said “I bought my unit 10 years ago and a similar unit near me sold recently for almost three times that price”.

Other positives about the area mentioned through the surveys are the large house blocks in Altona North and Brooklyn, the easy access to the shops and services, to the beach and to the city.

What sort of things do you do locally and what are the facilities you use?

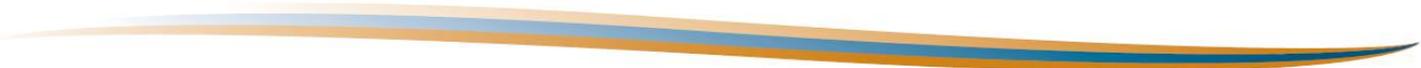
The main activity that people appear to do locally is shopping. This was common to all groups included in the consultation. As mentioned earlier, Altona Gate, Borrack Square and the Circle were commonly mentioned as places where people shop regularly. Reflecting positively on the availability of shopping and how it’s changed, one person said:

“There was nothing when I moved here, now there are 2 supermarkets, shopping is much better now.”

Other services that people use locally are health services, particularly doctors. However availability is an issue, as one person commented “there are too many people at the doctors” resulting in long waits before appointments and getting an appointment.

People at the consultations also spoke about using open space and leisure facilities in Altona North and Brooklyn. Those with small children use local playgrounds, while others mentioned using local parks to exercise or the Federation Trail for bike riding. Among young people, there was little mention of using local sports and leisure facilities, with the exception of bowling. While a number were involved in sport, all indicated participation occurs outside the area and in some cases, outside Hobsons Bay.

Activities offered by the Council were particularly important for older people in the focus groups. They enjoy the opportunity to participate in day trips and outings and also attending activity sessions, where they can socialise with other participants and staff. Older people also use services



such as meals on wheels and home help to support them to stay living in their own homes. As one woman commented, “I don’t have to bother my kids”.

Relationships with neighbours were regularly noted in the focus groups as something that connected them to their local area and which they really valued. Several women spoke about socialising with neighbours. Others, as mentioned earlier, highlighted that the relationship they have with long-term neighbours and that the history of that relationship is important to them.

One of the benefits of being connected into the local area was highlighted by a person who was recently arrived in Australia. An ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher where he is currently enrolled to learn English provided a lot of support to help him find a local school for his son so that he can access ESL classes.

People who participated in the survey conducted at the Altona Gate shopping centre mentioned they are generally able to buy what they need in Altona North and Brooklyn and that shopping locally is cheaper than in other nearby suburbs. Some also use the centre as a meeting place where people regularly catch up with friends

In common with participants in the focus groups, local services commonly used by survey respondents include doctors, clubs, parks and open space and leisure centres.

What things do you regularly do outside the area?

Activities that regularly took parents outside of Altona North and Brooklyn were often linked to the needs of their young children. Trips to places such as Cherry Lake or Williamstown were places they mentioned often in the search for good open space. They also visit play centres and kids gyms outside the area because they are not available locally.

Parents also spoke about the looming issue of finding an appropriate school, as some had children who were close to starting school. Although most admitted they hadn’t really looked into where their children would go, there is a perception among some that schools in the local area are not good. Some of their concerns included large class sizes and also low standards of sporting facilities.

Shopping in other locations was something that regularly cropped up in the focus group sessions. Footscray and Highpoint Shopping Centre in Maribyrnong are common places where people go to shop. This was particularly the case for young people, who mentioned that “other than food and necessities, I wouldn’t shop locally”.

Young people were very vocal about the lack of activities for them in the local area. Those who participated in sport tend to travel to other suburbs in the municipality to play in team sports. They also spoke about not having a cinema in Hobsons Bay and that the only options were to go to Highpoint or Werribee Plaza to see a film. Several young people also mentioned going to the city to pursue their interests in dancing and skateboarding, as the options locally were limited.

People also regularly travel to visit friends and family. Several older people mentioned that their children live some distance away or interstate. Several parents at the playgroup indicated they usually socialise outside the local area and don’t tend to have close relationships with anyone in their local community.



A number of people spoke about travelling to Footscray for medical and dental appointments. A common reason, particularly among people who were born overseas, was that they preferred a health provider who spoke the same language. In some cases, Footscray was the first place they lived on arriving in Australia and where they had established their medical supports. But as one person commented:

“It would be better if I could get the services I need here (rather than in Footscray). It would help me to meet people who are living here, in my area, rather than having to travel to Footscray. It would be more social.”

Williamstown was also mentioned by several older people for visits to podiatrists and optometrists.

The lack of a library in Altona North and Brooklyn was raised in the focus groups. People travel to libraries located in other suburbs in Hobsons Bay, to access library services.

How do you normally get about the area?

While all focus group participants indicated that they use a range of transport options, walking is a common method for people to get about in Altona North and Brooklyn. Parents of young children said they regularly walk, although there was mention that the footpaths in the area could be better maintained. They indicated that they prefer to stay away from main roads and intersections due to the large amount of traffic and the fumes from trucks. According to one person, the intersection at Millers Road and Blackshaws Road is “scary” and expressed concern about the lack of protective barriers at the pedestrian crossings.

Some people, particularly those without a car, said they combined walking and public transport to get about. One person walks for health reasons. “I want very much to walk. I am more than 60 years and everyday I want to exercise.” An older man who has lost his sight still walks everywhere, accompanied by his wife. Reinforcing the benefits of being close to services, another older person said “the Circle (shopping centre) has everything I need and I can walk there.”

Apart from walking, buses are also a common method for getting around, particularly for young people. But the service does not always meet their needs. As one person commented “the bus doesn’t always leave you where you want to go, you often had to walk a bit to get there.” Another problem with the bus service is that the service doesn’t operate in the evenings, so alternative transport options must be found. According to one man, “(During the day) I walk to Melbourne Road to catch the bus and at night I catch the train. We have no train close to home so my son picks me up from Newport (station).”

The benefits of using public transport were mentioned by one person with a concession card. “You can use it to catch the bus, train and tram. In Sydney, this is not the case. We are very lucky.”

People spoke about preferring to catch public transport to travel beyond Altona North and Brooklyn, especially when travelling to the city. According to one person “parking in the city is very expensive so using public transport is better. The bus over Westgate is very good.”

However in order to catch the train, people need to get to either Newport or Altona which are the closest stations. Young people are regular train users but they mentioned the distance to the station was a problem.



Among the elderly, public transport, walking and taxis are common ways to get about. For those who were still physically able, public transport and walking are often the main transport options. All spoke positively about the bus service and the walkability of the area. However some had difficulties catching buses, due to their frailty. They mentioned that using a walking aid, such as frames or walking sticks, made getting on and off buses very difficult. For the frail or infirm, taxis are often the only option for them to move about independently. Several women spoke about the difficulties of getting about following the death of their husbands, as neither had a driver's licence they had relied on their husbands to drive them around.

Several other transport methods are used by young people. Apart from having parents ferry them about, they also mentioned using skateboards and riding a bike.

Asked if they felt safe moving around the area, the responses of people varied. In general, young people felt safe walking and getting about. However one person commented "I feel safe on the bus and train, but it would be better if the bus ran at night". Several other people said they don't feel safe, particularly at night and some would like a greater police presence in the area.

What would make the area a better place to live/work/visit?

The things that would make Altona North and Brooklyn a better place again tended to vary according to age. For example, older people are generally happy about the state of the area and could not suggest anything they would like to change or improve. However, people who participated in other focus sessions mentioned a number of areas that could be better.

Both younger people and parents of young children felt that the bus service could be improved by extending the service to operate at night and ensuring buses run to the timetable. In addition, the lack of a train station in the area was an issue. One parent at the focus session proposed that the now closed train station (formerly used by Mobil) located on Ross Road, south of the Millers Road overpass, could be reinstated for the use of residents.

A number of environmental issues were raised as needing attention. While one long term resident said that the closure of the Carbon Black factory had improved the pollution situation, the smells from the petrochemical refinery are sometimes still a problem. Others mentioned the smells around Brooklyn as being bad, particularly in the mornings and at night and that they tend to be worse in summer. Several people also noted problems with smells from Kororoit Creek and suggested this may be due to the stagnant water in parts of the creek which have worsened because of drought.

Problems with health services centred on shortages of health professionals. Issues raised included that "there are not enough doctors in the area and waiting lists are very long" and "you can't get appointments with the doctor you want, so you usually have to go to doctors outside the local area". Also mentioned was the lack of dentists and access to bulk billing. People spoke about having to wait for three hours at Williamstown Hospital to receive attention, although others indicated the wait times at other hospitals at Sunshine and Footscray were even longer.

Parents of young children highlighted issues around childcare, suggesting the operating hours are often too restrictive for people who work. "Childcare opens at 7am and that is not early enough. Some jobs in the area require you to start at 7am and you can't if you can't get childcare." Another common issue raised is the long waiting lists at Council run childcare centres.



Other child-related issues included the lack of play centres and activities that cater for children and families. Play ground fencing was also identified as something that is needed especially when playgrounds are near water and busy roads. One person suggested that fencing was particularly important in relation to children with additional needs.

Other issues related to children and adults with additional needs was the shortage of local supports, particularly respite care and a lack of any special schools close by. Mention was also made about the need for more information about services for people with additional needs and their carers.

As mentioned earlier, people spoke about having to travel to get to a library and felt that a library would benefit the area. Other facilities that young people cited as lacking included a cinema, skate park and spaces that they could use for activities such as dancing.

There was general agreement at the playgroup session that other areas of the municipality seem to have more money spent on them and as a result, the general appearance of those areas is better than in Altona North and Brooklyn. People felt that general maintenance, such as road sweeping, has declined. This was particularly a concern for people living near the freeway.

An increase in the amount of traffic was an issue, with people believing the traffic has gotten worse over the past couple of years. Traffic on Millers Road was mentioned in the focus groups and surveys. One woman commented that “traffic on Millers Road is terrible. It’s difficult for older people because the lights change too quickly and cars ignore the pedestrian lights.”

There were also concerns that there are too many trucks using Millers and Blackshaws Roads, with one person suggesting that trucks are deviating off the main heavy vehicle routes to stop at the fast food outlets that are concentrated in the vicinity.

As mentioned earlier, those who walk around the area said they try to avoid the major roads because of the trucks and the fumes and also because of the risk of being hit by flying debris from passing trucks.

In relation to shopping, a number of people who participated in both the focus groups and survey mentioned the lack of clothing outlets in the area. Older people felt the range for their age group is limited. People indicated they travel to places such as Highpoint to buy clothing.

Do you expect to live here in the next 5 years, how do you think your needs will change?

On the whole, most people who participated in the focus groups said they intend to continue living in Altona North and Brooklyn. This was especially the case among older people, some of whom have lived in the area all their adult lives. Not surprisingly, young people were less certain about their future plans and where they will be living.

For some people, Altona North and Brooklyn suits both their needs and their means and so they would like to stay in the area. Others have strong connections and as one woman said “I grew up here, and there are too many memories here. I would like to stay and watch my children grow up in the same area I grew up in.” People spoke optimistically about the future of the area and feel “it’s going to keep improving.”



The sense of connection with the area was reiterated in the words of several other residents who have no plans to move. “Yes, I think we’ll stay here. My kids went to school locally and now they are at work.”

One person who was newly arrived from overseas said his family had settled well in the area and intended staying and access to education was high on the agenda. “I have a grandson who is starting school locally, so education will become important. One of my children is at Victoria University.”

For some, health issues influenced their future plans. One man spoke about having moved from the country to live with his daughter, due to his ill health. Despite having to move away from familiar surroundings and friends, he is generally happy to stay living in the area as he has access to the services and supports he requires.

Some of the reasons for people considering leaving the area were based on a lack of appropriate services. One person, who was generally dissatisfied with her standard of living and the availability of services, said “that if things don’t improve I will move away”. A mother of a child with a disability spoke about her concerns regarding the unmet needs of her child. “I won’t be able to stay in the area if I can’t get an integration aide for my child at a local school.”

One survey participant was also concerned about the rising cost of housing because people have been attracted by the area’s affordable prices. She spoke about the pressure this placed on young people trying to get into the housing market. “My daughter wants to buy here but all the cheaper houses are further out like Melton”.

Young people who participated in a focus session had no clear plans about their future, especially where they would be living. A number of them indicated that their families have plans to move to establishing areas such as Sanctuary Lakes and Point Cook. Others with families who are fairly mobile spoke about having shifted house a number of times and were not sure about their family’s plans.

In relation to their future plans, the focus for young people tended to be either on leaving school soon and getting a job or finishing Year 12. In most instances, young people in the focus groups said they had no plans to study beyond Year 12.

Memories of life in Altona North and Brooklyn

Older people who participated in a focus group spoke about how much the area had changed since they first arrived. One woman remembered a quarry that was operating where the Altona Gate shopping centre is now located. She also talked about her early transport methods prior to owning a car - of cycling down Millers Road to go to the beach and of riding with her husband in the side car of their motorcycle.

One woman had lived in Altona North for more than 50 years. After migrating from Germany, she lived in a migrant hostel with her family. She spoke about difficulties she faced trying to find housing which was in short supply and real estate agents not wanting to rent housing to families with young children.

D: Consultation Questions

Appendix 1

Street Survey

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|---|
| <p>What's your connection with the area?</p> <p>Local resident <input type="checkbox"/> HB resident <input type="checkbox"/> Work here <input type="checkbox"/> Visitor <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other _____</p> <p>Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><20 years <input type="checkbox"/> 20-35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36-55 <input type="checkbox"/> >55 <input type="checkbox"/></p> |
| <p>What are the things that make it a good place to live / work / visit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The facilities (eg parks, open space, leisure facilities)▪ Access to shops; shops have what you need▪ Access to services (doctors dentists etc, childcare/MCH, schools)▪ Affordable housing▪ Close to work▪ Safe environment (walking about, after dark, in home) |
| <p>What are some of the facilities you use in the local area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Childcare/MCH/preschool/schools▪ Sports/ recreation▪ Neighbourhood▪ Community centre/halls▪ Seniors centres |
| <p>What would make it a better place to live / work / visit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ sport/leisure▪ meeting /socialising opportunities▪ transport▪ shops▪ services▪ safety▪ work |

Focus Group Questions**What's your connection with the area?**Local resident HB resident Work here Visitor

Other _____

Male Female <20 years 20-35 36-55 >55

1. If you were describing Brooklyn/Altona North what are some of the area's distinctive features? (what makes it different to other places)

2. What are the things that make it a good place to live / work / visit?

Prompts

- The facilities (eg parks, open space, leisure facilities)
- Access to shops; shops have what you need
- Access to services (doctors dentists etc, childcare/MCH, schools)
- Affordable housing
- Close to work
- Safe environment (walking about, after dark, in home)

3. What sort of activities do you do locally?

Prompts

- Member of club / group
- Play sport
- Socialise / meet with friends
- Volunteer
- Shop
- Work

4. What are some of the facilities you use in the local area?

Prompts

- Childcare/MCH/preschool/schools
- Sports/ recreation
- Neighbourhood
- Community centre/halls
- Seniors centre

5. What things do you regularly do outside the area eg in other parts of Hobsons Bay or beyond?

Prompts

- library
- shop

- 
- go to school
 - access services health
 - Sport/leisure activities
 - Catch up with friends / socialise

6. How do you normally get about the area?

Prompts

- public transport
- drive
- walk
- ride a bike)

Is it easy / safe to get about?

7. What would make it a better place to live / work / visit?

Prompts

- sport/leisure places
- meeting /socialising opportunities
- transport
- shops
- services
- safety
- work

8. Do you expect to still be living here in the next 5 years – if yes – how do you think your needs will change

- facilities
- services