

Laverton

Neighbourhood Profile



First published by Hobsons Bay City Council 2009

The data profile was updated in 2015 and includes 2011 census data.

Other sections in the profile have not been updated.



Laverton Neighbourhood Consultations

A. Introduction

The Laverton Neighbourhood Profile provides an overview of the history and development of the area, data about the characteristics of residents and information about the types of services and facilities that are available in the area.

However, none of this information can describe how people feel about living and working in Laverton. In order to gain a better understanding of these perspectives, this section contains a summary of a number of extensive consultations that took place in 2005 and 2008.

The 2005 consultation was part of the Laverton Together: Community Strengths and Needs Study that preceded Laverton becoming part of the Community Renewal initiative in 2006. Another large consultation was conducted in 2008 to inform the Laverton Food Security Report.

Some findings of a 2008 Travel Smart survey of Years 7-12 students at Laverton College and a 2009 Laverton Community Centre Transport Survey are also included. The surveys asked about travel modes to school and the centre and why these options were chosen. The outcomes of the surveys provide information about how people travel around and to other areas outside the Laverton neighbourhood.

In addition, this consultation section includes the recollections and reflections of a number of long term residents who participated in the Laverton Torch Project, in 2007. Using the arts, the Torch Project engaged the community around the themes of history, culture, identity and belonging. It culminated in the release of a DVD “Laverton – It’s My Home” which tells the story of Laverton’s history and development. (It should be noted that the Laverton some residents refer to on the DVD incorporates parts of the ‘old’ Laverton suburb, including Altona Meadows and across to Point Cook.)

B. Methodology

The consultation for the Laverton Together: Community Strengths and Needs Study had input from four key groups with connections with Laverton. They included:

- Residents of Laverton
- The Laverton Together Action Group
- Service providers
- Stakeholder groups

As part of the study, 180 people participated in community workshops and a further 114 people participated in focus groups.

The Laverton Food Security consultation involved 93 people (12 men and 81 women), who were over 20 years of age. They were consulted through surveys and focus groups. While the consultation was primarily about food it also covered transport and other issues around the variety and supply of shopping outlets in Laverton.



The Laverton Community Hub transport survey was conducted in early 2009 and received responses from 83 Laverton residents. While the survey focused on the way they travelled to the hub, the findings provide some general information about how people get about the local area.

In addition, a Travel Smart survey of students and staff at Laverton College was undertaken in October 2008. Travel Smart is a State government initiative and 169 students in Years 7-12 and 35 staff participated in the survey. Just over 50 per cent of students lived outside Laverton in Altona Meadows and the Wyndham municipality. Almost 50 percent of staff lived in other areas of Hobsons Bay and Wyndham.

C. The Findings

The following notes are a summary of the discussions and a range of issues drawn from the consultations, outlined in the methodology.

How would you describe the Laverton area?

In describing Laverton, a long term residents said “There are many, many good people in Laverton. It’s not how much money you have in the bank; it’s what you carry in your heart”.

The strength of people’s connection with Laverton was also revealed through the consultations. The benefit of living in an area that was on the urban fringe was a point that was expressed in different ways. People appreciated that Laverton was a “bit like a country town and not like suburbia”. It was also the place where people had raised their families. For some, it was about emotional connection. “I’ve been here all my life. I went away for a little while, but it’s in here (touches heart). This is my home”. Others felt there was a strong community spirit in the area and that local people were “there for each other”; but also respected one another’s privacy.

Laverton was described as a place that has a lot to offer “but that it has tended to be unrecognised for all that it does have”. Others spoke about Laverton having a “good atmosphere” and that it was a down to earth place, without pretensions. For some, it represented an opportunity to buy a home they could afford. Laverton also offered a new beginning, for those who were born overseas.

However, its location on the border of two municipalities had its downside. As one person put it, Laverton “used to be on the edge of Wyndham, now it’s on the edge of Hobsons Bay - whatever happens we’re used to being the poor sister”. This sense of being somewhat marginalised was also expressed through concerns about the poor appearance of parts of Laverton, sometimes put down to lack of general maintenance or improvements in the area but also linked to a need for greater community pride. One person also spoke about the poor image of Laverton, suggesting that “people perceive it as a dump”.

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

The recognition of living in a cohesive community was a recurring theme in the consultations. As mentioned earlier, people valued having neighbours and friends who were there if they needed help. They appreciated the general friendliness of the community and that there are “good people in Laverton”.

Laverton was also seen as a welcoming place for new arrivals from overseas. “We’ve had a lot of new arrivals and they’ve blended in. We all mix in. We’re all Australians.”



The quietness of the area and the feeling of safety identified as positives aspects of living in Laverton, with one resident pointing out that “after 2 months overseas [I] came home and the house was untouched”. This perhaps also reflects the benefits of having good neighbours.

Another important feature of Laverton was affordability in terms of buying a home. As a result, people spoke about how fortunate they were to be mortgage free. However, there was also concern about maintaining housing affordability. “Affordable home ownership is one of the best things about Laverton but don’t lose it [affordability] in attracting new investment.”

Laverton’s proximity to the city was highlighted as something people really enjoyed. They enjoyed that “the beach is not far away” with the proviso that “you can get there safely”; this was particularly in relation to cycling or taking public transport. In describing the accessibility of Laverton, another person mentioned that “it’s probably unique in that it’s one of the best situated suburbs in Melbourne – how easy is it to get onto the freeway or get a train, bus anywhere – it’s all here”. Others were not as satisfied with the public transport system and their comments are covered later in this summary.

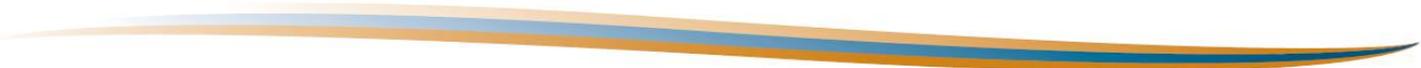
What sort of things do you do locally and what are some of the facilities you use?

There were a number of facilities in Laverton that people identified as assets for the community. Both the kindergarten and the swim centre were used, particularly by families, but according to one person “[the pool] needs an upgrade”.

McCormack Park, the largest area of open space in Laverton, was also seen as important feature. According to one resident, “McCormack Park is Lavo’s saving grace”. It was suggested that recent upgrades to the park and it’s infrastructure had signalled a “turning point towards a better future for Laverton”. (Section 1 of the complete Laverton profile outlines future improvements for the park.)

The historical importance of having a secondary school in Laverton was highlighted by one long term resident: “The biggest change was when they built the high school. Before, I used to bus it to Werribee. So when they built the school, kids in the area could go to a school that actually belonged to them.” With the redevelopment of Laverton College in 2009, the facility will be available for community use, outside of school hours – a move that was welcomed. This was especially the case for residents on the north side of the railway line who were critical of the lack of services and programs in their area. They spoke about the convenience and shorter walking distances as a result of community programs being offered at the school site.

There were mixed views about the local services. On one hand, a person said “it’s so central, the doctor is just down the road, supermarkets to burn, within striking distance”. Others also commented about the “good collection of shopping and community facilities”. However, the downside was that most were located “south of railway line”. People talked about shopping in Laverton as “convenient for getting a few items” in between their main shopping at places such as the Central Square Shopping Centre in Altona Meadows or Altona Gate Shopping Centre. “I go to Altona Gate. There’s a lot of competition there and things are cheaper.” The difficulty for elderly people getting to the local shops was also mentioned. “It’s easier to go to Footscray on the bus. It goes down Bladin St. and drops them near Footscray station right outside Coles. It’s easier than walking over the train tracks, people don’t like carrying bags back.”



The issue of cost was a major influence on people's shopping behaviours and determining where they shopped. "It's too expensive to shop in Laverton...I go to markets, like Footscray, Victoria, South Melbourne markets". Members of Laverton's Burmese community spoke about catching the train to Footscray to shop at the Asian food stores and markets. Some longer term residents reflected on the impact the decommissioning of the airstrip at the RAAF base has had on local businesses. With the loss of a large number of working families connected to the base, "disposable incomes fell and shops in Lohse and Woods Streets closed" and many remain empty.

Residents spoke about being users of the Laverton Community centre and the programs on offer. Among older residents, the Golden Age Club was a facility that was regularly used and provided a place to meet friends and which encouraged them to get out of their homes and to be involved.

Whilst technically located in the Wyndham municipality, the Laverton Skate Centre, which has been operating for around 25 years, became a "focal point" for the area. A resident, who had been involved in the construction of the centre and who still skates there, described its introduction as "an innovation for the area – one of the only things for the kids" and one which is still popular.

Another activity in Laverton that people enjoyed was the annual Community Festival. Held in November, the festival was described as a "great effort".

Getting about Laverton

Apart from the two travel surveys, the consultations findings that informed this summary (and outlined in the methodology) did not include specific questions about how residents travelled about. Nevertheless, transport options and issues were mentioned in the 'strengths and needs' and 'food security' consultations. Relevant comments have been included below, together with some of the survey findings.

As mentioned in the section above on 'what things make Laverton a good place to live', good access to public transport and proximity to major road networks were seen as positive attributes of living in Laverton. As one person put it "the train's on our doorstep". People responded positively to the current upgrade of the Laverton Railway station and the community benefits it would bring. It "can't happen soon enough, especially regarding disabled access". Laverton Railway station is the last Zone 1 station on the City/Werribee line, after which the cost of tickets increases. While residents benefit from this zoning, they spoke about the increased volume of traffic this created, with large numbers of people from other areas driving to Laverton take advantage of the cheaper train fares.

In the 'strengths and needs' consultation conducted in Laverton in 2005 and in subsequent conversations with residents about transport, a number of people highlighted the inadequacy of the bus service, particularly the two routes that operate along Bladin Street, north of the railway line. People wanted a bus service that ran until 9pm. They raised the poor connectivity with other bus services and the need for a bus route to Laverton North, which is an employment precinct.

Of the 83 residents who participated in the Laverton Community Hub transport survey, half (41) walked to the hub, higher than the number of people who travelled by car, either as a driver or passenger. Their reasons for walking varied but the most common were the convenience, having no other options or for health and fitness. Walking was also the most popular commuting options for students at Laverton College (34%). These findings suggest a high proportion of pedestrians in Laverton, however residents who participated at the consultations commented that the footpaths



were “very bad if you are old, have young children or are pushing a pram”. Others were also concerned about the lack of footpaths and the resulting safety issues for children walking to school. “Sometimes daughter has to walk on road.”

The predominant method for getting to school for teachers at Laverton College was by car. Ninety four per cent travelled by car, with 74 per cent driving alone. The lack of direct public transport services and the difficulty in travelling by public transport from Melbourne’s eastern suburbs to the west were the main reasons they chose to travel by car.

Although only a small number of people who participated in any of the transport surveys cycled around the neighbourhood, the provision of safe bicycling options was raised in the consultations. People suggested that proper bike lanes should be incorporated on the Old Geelong Road and also in Bladin Street which is the main connecting street between the north and south side of Laverton and to the Laverton College. They also identified the potential to create a pathway from McCormack Park to connect up with the Federation Trail. (The trail currently passes to the north of Laverton and outside the Hobsons Bay municipality and links Brooklyn to Werribee.)

While some people highlighted the benefits of living in close proximity to major roads, others expressed frustration about the ramifications for Laverton, particularly in relation to entering and leaving the neighbourhood. As one person commented [it’s] “difficult to get out of Laverton during peak hours” and the volume of traffic is increasing.

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

It is important to reiterate that one of the consultations that is included in this summary took place in 2005. In the period since, much work has been undertaken as part of the Laverton Community Renewal initiative to respond to issues that were raised at the consultations. Among these are upgrades to the parks and play furniture, extensive tree planting, together with upgrading the entrances into the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, other issues are yet to be addressed. The consultations highlighted the strong views of residents about the need to improve both the physical appearance of Laverton and the linkages to adjacent areas and some of these.

The physical barrier of the railway line was viewed as a serious impediment, with people mentioning a general lack of facilities and services on the north side of the railway line. There is “access to everything for those who live south of Railway Ave”. While only part of the solution, the current upgrade of the Laverton Railway Station will provide improved accessibility. (See ‘What’s Ahead’ in the Section 1 of the complete neighbourhood profile for information about the upgrade of Laverton Railway Station.)

The need for better management of traffic and transport linkages were common themes. This was not surprising given Laverton is ‘road locked’ by the Old Geelong Road and the Princes Freeway. The physical barrier of the railway line, creating a north and south divide, was regularly raised. Suggestions included providing safe and accessible pedestrian access to local community and shopping facilities to avoid crossing the railway line. People also described the level crossing at Aviation Road as a “nightmare”, exacerbated by the constant flow of traffic in Aviation Road accessing the freeway on-road. The entry to Old Geelong Rd, at the northern end of the neighbourhood, was described as a “nightmare for both pedestrians and motorists which needed a proper pedestrian crossing”. (See ‘What’s Ahead’ for the upgrade of Aviation Road in Section 1 of the complete profile.)





People spoke about a lack of neighbourhood pride and suggested a couple of ways this could be addressed was through better house maintenance by residents and the removal of rubbish, particularly around bus stops, the high school and along the freeway barrier. In relation to the freeway barrier, people mentioned the need for more attractive surrounds on the residential side of the barrier and of waiting for VicRoads to properly landscape and maintain this area.

Participants in the 'food security' consultation said they would like access to a wider variety of food outlets and food options. Some suggested the use of vacant shops in Lohse and Woods Streets would provide a lift for this rundown area and improve the shopping options for those living north of the railway line.

The provision of more diverse housing stock was identified as a gap. According to one person, "not just poor people should live here". The neighbourhood lacked housing that catered to the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities.

It was suggested that there was a shortage of recreational options in Laverton, particularly for young people. The provision of more playground equipment and "opportunities for kids that don't cost money - youth are bored but can't afford much" were both mentioned.

For those who were at home, including the elderly and those not working, loneliness was an important issue. "There's a lot of people in Laverton who sit indoors everyday...because of low self esteem ... can't afford to go out ... don't feel safe crossing roads."

Memories of living in Laverton

A number of older people who participated in The Torch Project, mentioned earlier, shared their memories of what Laverton was like when they first arrived. In some instances, they had lived in Laverton for more than forty years. As mentioned earlier, when these older residents talked about Laverton they were often referring to when Altona Meadows was part of the suburb, an area that some people described as Laverton South.

People spoke about Laverton as being "paddocks everywhere and no streets as such". They commented that "when I built my house it was all chook farms. It was rural – no streets, no water, drains, nothing".

Historically, the RAAF base had been a major presence in the area, with most of the initial housing built as enlisted men's quarters. People mentioned the RAAF housing had arrived in kit form from England and that many still existed in and around Wackett Street, at the north eastern edge of the neighbourhood. Some felt these pre-war houses "should be preserved because they are historic". Because many of the men who worked at the base had young and growing families, the area became known among the locals as 'the cabbage patch', a euphemism for where babies came from. "RAAF families seemed to breed pretty well, [there were] kids everywhere." The base was also a central part of the social life for employees who regularly attended functions and the cinema. However, reduced activity at the base impacted heavily on Laverton. "It was a really big thing when the RAAF closed. We lost the school. It was really terrible for Laverton because so many people moved out and then the state took it back for private housing." As a result, "we had to learn to live again". *(Editorial: it is incorrect to say that the RAAF base has closed. The base is still operational however the airstrip was decommissioned some years ago).*



Living in Laverton in the future

There was no explicit question in the consultation about whether people intended to continue living in Laverton. However among long term residents, it was clear Laverton was their 'home'. As one person put it, "I love it. When I first came here, it was a nice quiet place and I've always liked it. I think I made a good move when I came down here".

These sentiments were shared by others. Comments in a similar vein included:

"This is really my home. I might have been born somewhere else but I don't feel that way."
It's my home and that's the way it will always be. I'm very proud of Laverton and I'm proud of all the kids here."

"We wouldn't still be here if we didn't like it. My kids have wanted me to leave and buy a small farm but we're quite happy here."