



Newport West

Neighbourhood Profile



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL

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Newport West Neighbourhood Consultation Summary

A. Introduction

The Newport West Profile provides an overview of the history and development of the neighbourhood, some data about the characteristics of residents and information about the types of services and facilities available in the neighbourhood.

However, none of this information can describe how people feel about Newport West 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 late 2011. What follows is a summary of the findings of those consultations and who participated in them.

During the consultations, several long term residents also shared their memories of living and working in Newport West and some of their comments are included towards the end of this consultation section.

B. Methodology

The consultation methods used to develop this section included focus groups and individual interviews.

In order to ensure a variety of views were heard, participants were drawn from a range of age groups. Each session lasted for approximately one hour.

Face to face interviews were conducted with three residents. In addition, three focus groups were undertaken involving:

- participants in activity groups at the Newport Senior Citizens centre
- Grade six students from Newport Lakes Primary School
- playgroup parents

The questions used in the consultations are included in Appendix 1.

C. Summary

The following notes are a summary of the comments of the participants in the consultation and are framed around the questions that were asked.

How would you describe Newport West

People who participated in the consultation were generally positive when talking about their experience of living in Newport West. For some, describing the neighbourhood was aligned with the social connections that they had established. They talked about the neighbourhood providing “a great family environment”, giving them opportunities to know their neighbours, to have good friends living nearby and in some instances meaning they could live close to their family.

One person who was moving in the near future described Newport West as “comfortable” and said “it will be difficult to leave” because of the strong networks she had made within the community. Another spoke about feeling more connected with the area since having children. “No kids on board translates to not being home as much, working longer hours and not connecting with your surrounds” and now being at home has meant “I have more time to get involved in activities”.

Having previously lived in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, several people spoke about Newport West as being a quiet place to live, something which they enjoyed. While “peak hour traffic is not a nightmare” they did sometimes miss aspects of inner city living, “a lack of choice being the main thing [I miss] - food, decent music, more diversity and things to do socially.”



Sculpture at entrance to Newport Lake
Source: Student, NewportLakes Primary School

Other people described the physical features of Newport West. Since first moving to the neighbourhood almost a decade ago, one person noted the positive improvements that had changed their perception about the place and these included the landscaping and upgrading Newport Lakes and the surrounds and also the opening of the Substation. Children at the local primary school also mentioned Newport Lakes as an important feature of Newport West and a place where they can ride a bike or walk the dog.



In summing up their impression of the neighbourhood, one person noted that it is changing, due to gentrification and new housing developments. As a result, “there is a new dynamic that challenges your familiarity [with the neighbourhood], but on balance the buzz adds excitement”. Another upside of Newport West’s gentrification was that it brought a new generation of residents and as a result, “there are more and more young couples, prams and children running about” which were reinvigorating the area.

What things make it a good place to live and work?

The quietness of Newport West was mentioned by a number of participants as something they particularly enjoyed about living in Newport West. They described it as having a country feel, that it was an attractive location and a “serene” place to live. Contributing factors were having good access to the coast and a feeling of openness and some also mentioned a lack of density in the buildings. One participant spoke of the attributes of being close to parks, sporting ovals and of “treed boulevards’ lining many of the streets. Children identified “being close to everyone”, “having good friends” and “great sports facilities” among the things they enjoyed about the neighbourhood.

Easy access to the city was an important feature, making the commute to work relatively straightforward. One person said that while proximity to the city wasn’t an essential it was an advantage made easy by good train or car access. Pointing to a lack of awareness of what the neighbourhood has to offer another person, with a number of friends who lived outside of the neighbourhood, commented “It’s always amusing how people are amazed at how close Newport is to town”. Others who worked in the west enjoyed living close to their job.

The affordability of housing in the area was an initial attraction for some participants. One person commented that “affordability is great, especially being single” and another said that they had settled on Newport West because “we couldn’t afford the eastern suburbs”. Having a growing family and needing a bigger house brought some people to the neighbourhood. “We needed more space for a second child and [were looking for] a house with four bedrooms, a backyard that was within our price range... We also had friends who moved to Newport near the Newport Lakes which was an influencing factor.”

From the children’s perspective, Newport West allowed them certain freedoms and independence. Some enjoyed being able to get around the neighbourhood by themselves, “I like riding down Scott Street because it’s quiet” and another enjoyed “riding my bike down to the sea (to the Strand) and buying an ice cream”.

Another aspect of Newport West that people appreciated was the diversity within the community, both the mix of old and new residents and the cultural diversity. As one participant mentioned, the presence of the neighbourhood’s Lebanese community and its strong orientation towards family made a great contribution to the area.



On a more reflective note, when asked to describe Newport West, a relative newcomer said that “you need to scratch the surface to find its beauty [and] have some interactions to understand the appeal of an area”.

For a group of older residents, it was clear that their capacity to interact with their neighbourhood had contracted and this had affected life for them. In most instances, this was because health issues had made it increasingly difficult for them to get about independently. So when asked to describe what they liked about the area their responses varied. While some talked about having family or good neighbours they could rely on, others were housebound and with few visitors, they missed having social interaction and felt isolated and lonely.

What activities do you do locally and what facilities do you use?

Participation in activities and the use of facilities varied, depending on age and stage of life. For the parents of young children, the use of childcare and maternal and child health (MCH) services were important priorities. All were users of the local MCH centre and were very positive about the role it filled in the wellbeing of both their babies and themselves. Mothers spoke about the flexibility of the service which allowed for structured visits and open sessions. They were also enthusiastic about “the fabulous staff who are welcoming and engaging and able to help [them] to adjust [to being a parent]”. They appreciated that the nurses were there as a backup to their doctor and also that “the door is always open if you want to use the bathroom facilities or a place to feed [the baby]”.

In relation to childcare, some mothers indicated that they would like to use this service but “access is difficult due to long waiting lists” and in some instances they were “resorting to family members” to fill the gap. Some mothers indicated they preferred to use family day care rather than a childcare centre.

One parent spoke about her children having used the toy library when they were small and of having enjoyed being within walking distance of the Hobson Bay kindergarten. There was a mixed reaction to the planned relocation to the Newport Gardens Primary School site, with some being sad to see them moved while others were more positive about the co-location of the school with children’s services. In terms of the next phase of moving on to school, it was still too early for parents of young babies to be firm about where their children would go to school, although most indicated they planned to send them to local primary schools.

There was a mixed response to access health services, especially to doctors. While some indicated they had a local doctor they were happy with, “the Challis Street medical centre is very accessible” and appointments were relatively easy to get, one person suggested there were “problems with the ratio of doctors” which made it difficult to get in to see a doctor. Another noted that “if a child is sick, it’s quicker to go to emergency at the Williamstown Hospital and wait 20 minutes”. The lack of bulk billing services in the neighbourhood was also mentioned.

Some people indicated they have yet to find a local doctor and have maintained contact with one where they previously lived. Most of the older people who participated in the consultation lived outside of the neighbourhood and while they generally had a local GP, there was an increased use of specialist services such as cardiologists and also of podiatrists that they had to travel to.

Asked about their use of the public library in Newport West, again there was a mixed response, with most people indicating that they preferred to use the new library in Altona North and the former Williamstown library which is being rebuilt. Most of those who were users of the Newport West library tended to only use it occasionally to borrow or for the Storytime sessions for children. Most people felt that the building needed to be improved and that it was too small. Some comments included, "It needs rejuvenation, possibly an overhaul [to include] other services"; "there's no lounging space to allow for reading"; and from the parent of small children, 'I'm conscious of the noise and disruption factor that may result from over-excited little ones'.

In terms of shopping, it was a mixed bag as to where people shopped for food and other purchases. The Mason Street shops were used by most people but in a number of cases this was mainly to supplement shopping that happened outside the neighbourhood. This was not always the case as there was also a group who enjoyed shopping locally, commenting that Mason Street offered a good range of shops that were in easy walking distance from home. One person spoke positively of shopping in Mason Street and welcomed the opening of a new IGA supermarket to replace "shopping at Coles and [I] will continue to support the smaller outlets for other stuff".

One child who seemed pretty familiar with Mason Street said they liked it "because there are lots of shops, mum does her shopping in the supermarket, but I like it because of the local library, the fish and chip shop, newsagency and the football oval behind it". Other children spoke of going to Sammy's bakery and 'Routley's for breakfast'. Locals also mentioned the Challis Street shops, using the milk bar and picking up the newspaper there.



Newport Lakes Primary School
Source: Student, Newport Lakes Primary School

Sport and recreational pursuits were among the activities adults and children did locally and also outside of the neighbourhood. As mentioned earlier, Newport Lakes played an important recreational role, as a place to walk the dog and for children to ride their bikes "along the

lake's edge and over the obstacles and hills". In terms of more formal activities the children talked about playing netball and football at school and some played in the juniors for the

Newport Power football club, at Bryan Martyn Reserve. One parent's son played cricket and was involved in Auskick at the reserve and noted that there are now over 100 children participating in these sessions.

Parents with babies were occasional users of the neighbourhood's playgrounds but felt these spaces "needed to be more accommodating of a range of ages and also for children with disabilities". Parents also indicated they didn't like their babies crawling in bark soft fall and would prefer a rubberised surface but said that they would probably use them more as their children got a little older.

Talking about cultural facilities, people described the Substation as "a beautiful space" that offered a mix of creative activities and events. People enjoyed the flexibility of the building and the surrounding spaces to deliver exhibitions, markets and music.



Hoffman Reserve
Source: Student, Newport Lakes Primary School

What things do you regularly do outside the neighbourhood?

The activities that were most commonly mentioned as undertaken outside of Newport West were visits to health services, shopping and participation in sport.

In relation to health services, some people attended the South Kingsville Health Co-operative or doctors in Williamstown or Altona North. Williamstown Hospital was also a service that was used but more often than not it was for emergencies only. They were also more likely to have a dentist in nearby suburbs or out of the municipality than to visit one locally. As one person commented, a visit to the dentist was more likely to be planned rather than an emergency and so people were happy to keep the dentist where they had previously lived or one that had been recommended.

Supermarket shopping tended to happen in areas other than Newport West. It was evident that for the large weekly shop, people went to Williamstown or did "a big shop at the Altona Gate supermarket or the one at the Rifle Range". One person who shopped in Williamstown was



frustrated with the lack of parking there. “Parking is an issue that needs to be addressed. It’s frustrating taking the car [to shop] because the parking is limited. Others spoke of shopping at the Circle, Borrack Square and “the hidden gems like Altona Fresh”, all in the adjacent suburb of Altona North. Some travelled further afield to shop for food and mentioned Footscray (for Asian foodstuffs) and also the Victoria and South Melbourne markets.

A lack of clothing shops in the Newport West meant shopping elsewhere, or as one person put it, being “forced to go to Highpoint”. A lack of appropriate clothes shops was an issue for older residents too who said they tended to travel to Altona Meadows and Altona Gate, although they described Altona Gate as having poor transport access which made it difficult for people with mobility problems.

In relation to sporting and recreational activities, the Bayfit pool and gym in Altona North was a commonly used facility. However, one person felt children’s swimming lessons there were too costly and that the “Maribyrnong pool was much more interesting for kids and much cheaper.. Bayfit lacks sophistication and the changing rooms are poorly fitted out”. Several others mentioned using the pool and sports facilities at Albert Part and another played club cricket outside of Hobsons Bay.

A number of the children who participated in the consultation played sports outside of Newport West but still within the municipality. Some played tennis at Williamstown and Brooklyn, basketball in Altona, badminton in Altona North and played with other football clubs. Beyond Hobsons Bay, one cycled with a club in Brunswick and others did gymnastics.

Recreational activities that were pursued in nearby areas were linked to the coast: people visited the beach, Jawbone Park, the Warmies and the Strand. The beach and coastal trails were particularly popular for those with a dog or who enjoyed cycling

As mentioned earlier, adults and children generally indicated they didn’t often use the Newport library in Mason Street. Instead they liked the new library in Altona North, particularly the children. One parent was looking forward to the completion of the new Williamstown library because their children were involved in a range of sports activities there and in the interim they used the library’s online service.

How do you get about the neighbourhood?

Modes of transport options were usually influenced by the age of the consultation participants. Asked how they got to school, children normally walked or rode a bike or scooter and a few were driven. Outside of school, riding their bikes was common and one boy spoke about his adventure “riding all the way to Essendon and riding down to the river and onto the Maribyrnong trail and back”. By preference, the children said they “try to avoid busy roads and use quieter streets, but people yell at you for being on the footpaths.”



Adult participants said that being close to the Newport railway was handy and that the train service was quite good. Several mentioned catching the train into the city and across to Altona, while a couple of the children said they catch the train occasionally. Not unexpectedly, the car was also used by most adults for getting to work, for shopping and generally getting about.

For a number of older participants, the train was the preferred option for public transport to get to the doctor or to shop, although one person said they did not feel safe using the train. However it was not surprising that failing health made it increasingly difficult for a number of them to continue to use public transport.

When asked about the bus, several older residents talked about the difficulty with the bus service, but they all appreciated the community bus that brought them to the planned activity group where this consultation took place. Parents said the public bus service was not convenient and that they had difficulty getting on with a pram, while older people said they were unable to negotiate the steps and could only catch the newer low rider buses or were unable to walk to the bus stop. An older resident, who did use the bus after no longer being able to drive a car, described the service as being “not bad”.

Other options for older people who were still able to get about reasonably independently included motorised scooters and walking. As one person said “I must keep walking because of a hip problem” while another said that they used a frame but that walking was getting harder as time went by. As a result, they were more reliant on taxis and family to get them about. One woman who had limited support from family or friends and who had difficulty walking was essentially housebound and spoke of her loneliness, highlighting the importance of activity groups for older residents.

Do you think Newport West is a safe place?

While most people felt that Newport West was a relatively safe place there were some aspects to the neighbourhood that concerned some participants in the consultation. Overwhelmingly their concern related to road traffic. Two streets in particular were mentioned. One parent was worried about the high volume of traffic on Blackshaws Road and due to its lack of pedestrian crossings, was “afraid to let the children walk to school”. Another parent commented that she was happy for her children to ride to school and that not having to cross a busy road such as Mason Street was a plus. According to one adult, “it’s a little daunting crossing Mason Street, especially around the 5.00pm mark”.

Concern about busy roads was also mentioned by children (see section on getting around), but generally they tried to avoid them if they could but if not they seemed to have good road sense. “Crossing Mason Street is a bit tricky, so I wait for the lollipop man”. Parents concern about Blackshaws Road was echoed by one of the children who said, “My dog died there and there’s no pedestrian crossing. [They] were going to install one a year ago but it didn’t happen”.



A few adults and children mentioned that they were wary of groups of young people “hanging around” near the Newport Station and also near the Challis Street shops. They said the area around the underpass to the station “does cause some anxiety ... it’s not pleasant”. There were also several comments about ‘hooning’ around the Mason Street and Maddox Road area.

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

A relative newcomer to the neighbourhood felt that the areas around “Melbourne Road and Mason Street are not very appealing, not beautiful, whereas some of the streets are lovely. The main gateways look abandoned” and would benefit from some attention. One older resident expressed the view that “the place looks rundown, the shops especially. It needs a good clean up”.

Children also talked about the physical appearance of the streets and didn’t like the graffiti or the vandalism around bus stops. They were concerned about rubbish and for one it was about the fishers who “left behind fishing hooks and line and other garbage”.

However according to others, time was helping to improve the neighbourhood’s overall appearance, as old industrial sites were redeveloped, street trees matured and more were planted.

Those who had lived in the neighbourhood for sometime talked about new housing developments that were occurring which they felt were changing the character of the neighbourhood. “What was initially attractive [about Newport West] was the lack of high density, but this is changing. Houses from the 1960s and 70s “that are not desirable or protected are being pulled down in droves” and being replaced by higher density development which “added noticeably to the congestion”.

A cross-section of people also wanted a better mix of retail outlets to suit all ages and among these were clothing shops, “somewhere to buy good bread and a nice wine bar”. One older resident, lamenting the lack of choice, spoke about the loss of the local milk bars and of there being too many coffee shops.

An issue that is common across all of metro Melbourne is concern about house prices. Several in the parents group commented on the decline in affordability in the neighbourhood with one wanting to move to a quieter street but rising house prices were making that an impossible option. Similarly, another who was renting could not afford to buy.

Do you plan to stay in Newport West?

On the whole, people said they intended staying in Newport West for the foreseeable future, although several indicated that they would be moving to be closer to family and work. In other instances, a family was hoping to move to some acreage outside of Melbourne, in a couple of



years while another person pondered about 'life after children' and the possibility of moving to the coast "sometime down the track".

Younger parents, who had moved to Newport West in search of a family home, generally intended to stay put. Now that they had bought a house, they were feeling settled in the area and were enjoying the friendships they'd established. They said they now had more time to get involved because they were at home, caring for babies, or were working part time.

A number of residents, having bought a home and renovated it, were looking forward to becoming more familiar with their neighbourhood. While some said they would probably need a larger house at some point, they would like to remain living in Newport West. However as mentioned earlier, rising house prices were affecting some people's capacity to buy into the neighbourhood.

In summing up what would keep them living in Newport West, one person put it down to the importance of good neighbours. "I don't want to lose the spirit of my street and the street connections".

Consultation Questions

What's your connection with Newport West?

Local resident HB resident Work here Visitor

Other _____

1. If you were describing Newport West 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

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)

7. Is it easy / safe to get about?

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

Prompts

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

9. 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