

Williamstown

Neighbourhood Profile



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NB: The data profile was updated in 2016 and includes 2011 census data. Other sections in the profile have not been updated.



Williamstown neighbourhood Consultations

A. Introduction

The Williamstown 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 available in the neighbourhood.

However, none of this information can describe how people feel about Williamstown 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 early 2009.

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

B. Methodology

Several consultation methods were used namely focus groups, individual interviews and a survey.

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

The focus groups included:

- Participants in a planned activity group for older people (PAG)
- Playgroup parents
- Grades 5 and 6 students from Williamstown Primary School
- English as a Second Language (ESL) students

Five people were interviewed individually or in a small group and a survey was sent to the members of the Williamstown Chamber of Commerce.

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

C. Findings

How would you describe Williamstown?

A recurring description of the Williamstown neighbourhood is that it is buffered from the hustle and bustle of suburban life. The physical geography of the area plays an important role in creating a sense of being “tucked away”. Williamstown is surrounded on two sides by water and while it is an attractive destination point for visitors, it is generally not impacted by passing traffic. A couple of long term residents spoke positively about the location, “I look out of my house and see water which gives Williamstown a sense of isolation and a village feel” and “It’s a mix of being a country town and a seaside town. It’s a place that you want your kids to grow up in and the proximity to the beach gives it a holiday feel.”



The contained nature of Williamstown was also a positive feature for younger children involved in the consultation and they talked about having a sense of freedom and independence.

It's not too big. You know where you are, so it's easy to find your way about.

I'd never get lost in Willie... I always know where I am.

My parents don't get worried because it's small. In bigger places my parents would be checking where I was.

Because they were familiar with the area, children saw Williamstown as being a physically safe place, strengthened by the fact that they knew and were recognised by local residents. They talked about knowing their neighbours and of sometimes knowing people's faces but not always their names. "It's got its own little community. Everyone knows everyone."

In describing Williamstown, one young student said "It's got history" and talked about areas related to its early settlement, such as Point Gellibrand. Williamstown's history was one of the factors that attracted a more recent arrival to the neighbourhood who relocated from the inner city after living there for 30 years. "I'm interested in history. I didn't really know Williamstown existed. But I had friends in the west and came over the Westgate and found Williamstown".

Longer term residents described the neighbourhood as a place that is changing, as new residents are attracted to the area. "The Williamstown I knew was a place where everyone knew each other. It was a social experience but now it's more about the individual." Another person noted the changing demographic. "When I first arrived it was definitely more working class, but that's changed."

Along with these changes in the population, people also talked about their attachment to the physical character of the area and of wanting to protect the characteristics that make Williamstown unique. "I want it to keep its seaside feel – smaller and simpler – not like a millionaires' row, not like the St Kilda marina."

What makes it a good place to live and work?

Residents of Williamstown spoke positively about living in an area where there was a strong sense of community and open friendliness among the locals. One person commented that "walking down the street, people talk and say hello. This is a very close neighbourhood. I know everyone in the street and we chat – sometimes you have to avoid people!" Another person mentioned the long term friendships that had formed when a number of the women in her street were at home caring for children. "There was lots of interaction through childminding, borrowing and socialising. Some of the families in the street used to holiday together. We used to have street parties but these became too expensive when charges for street parties were introduced."

Initially attracted to the community and the village feel of Williamstown, a former resident said that "having lived in Melbourne for 10 years, it was the first time I knew my neighbours. You met people because they're out and about on the street". A newer resident had clear criteria for choosing to live in Williamstown. "I wanted to buy into an area that had a sense of community, a mixture of age groups, but I also wanted to be able close the door and be private. I also like that there is social housing here and I was surprised that several shops were running a slate for pensioners who couldn't afford to pay till the next pension. All this mixed in with social housing!" However, alongside an appreciation for the strength of the local community, there were concerns about changes in the area. According to one person, rising housing costs had changed the demographic of Williamstown residents and as a result there was a "snobbishness among some residents".

As mentioned earlier, the fact that Williamstown is not affected by passing traffic was regarded as a really positive aspect of the area. One person who had previously lived in a congested inner suburb commented, "I was surprised about the lack of through traffic because noise pollution bothers me."

People were also appreciative of living near the beach, although for different reasons. While enjoying being close to the sea, a former resident commented, "I didn't swim much but the proximity to the water and the open space was calming", others were more actively engaged. "Our focus is on sailing more than on the beach and swimming. All the family are involved in sailing and we've made good friendships through it." Along with enjoying visits to the dog beach, children spoke about discovering the nooks and crannies at the beach and described "a secret spot with a little bit of sand – good for little kids, it's safe, it's really shallow and then it gets deep. It's got rocks so there aren't any waves."

As a result of living near the sea, people listed a range of activities they enjoyed including ocean swimming, cycling and walking along the beach and its environs. However, the popularity of the beach had some downsides, "often in summer it's too crowded so I use it [the beach] after hours."

Apart from the beach and the variety of sports and leisure activities they're involved in, students at the local primary school enjoyed the Nelson Place precinct. "Nelson Place is a mix of shops and restaurants but not crammed. It's like an outdoor shopping mall." They particularly liked the ice-cream shop and restaurants located there.



Source: Nelson Place, photo by Williamstown Primary School student

Elderly residents felt that Williamstown provided them with a secure base. It was a place that was familiar, "where you know people" and have established friendships and routines. They spoke about having good neighbours they could call on. They also enjoyed having access to places such as the senior citizens which provided the opportunity to socialise. One person was a great walker, despite requiring a walking frame, and enjoyed the social interaction and exercise it provided.

Other positive features of living in Williamstown were that "it's only about 20 minutes from everywhere" and "it's close to the city and Highpoint but far enough away from everything too". People felt that it was a safe neighbourhood. As mentioned early, children felt confident about their personal safety and this view was supported by others. "I go to bed with the doors unlocked and generally feel safe walking about." Other people mentioned that while the area had experienced its share of burglaries and occasional violence, they believed that these were random events rather than the norm.

What things do you do locally and what local facilities do you use?



Source: Williamstown Beach, photo by Williamstown Primary School student

Younger children were involved in a broad range of activities, predominantly sporting, in the local area. A number of these activities were centred on the beach and included participation in a cold water swimming program and the nippers group at the Life Saving Club, snorkelling and sailing, together with fishing off the pier near Nelson Place. Some played team sports including basketball, football, cricket, tennis and lacrosse as part of the school program and also outside of school hours. Involvement in scouts was also mentioned.

Beach related activities were also popular with families. As mentioned earlier, sailing played an important role in the leisure and social life of some. Parents of younger children looked forward to them joining the nippers program when they were a little older and generally felt there were plenty of activities for their children. That said, they acknowledged that the costs associated with some activities might be an issue for some families.

People's shopping preferences varied markedly. One person said that most of their shopping was done locally, except for 'one off', larger purchases which tend to be made at larger centres such as Highpoint. According to another, "I predominantly shop locally. I do go to Footscray market but buy groceries, clothing, gifts here." Some people tended to spread their shopping. "I use the local supermarket and butcher and also shop at the Victoria Market and at Altona Gate. In relation to clothing, Williamstown tends to be upmarket and pricey and doesn't have 'everyday' clothes."

The cost and variety of shops influenced how some people shopped. A former resident said "I did nearly all of my shopping locally with a shopping jeep. It [Williamstown] has most of the things you need – maybe not at the cheapest price. Otherwise, I tended to shop at Highpoint because it's cheaper and with clothing there's more of a selection. Williamstown tends to be more upmarket with higher quality boutiques."

Students attending an English as a Second Language (ESL) class in Williamstown but who were not necessarily residents of the neighbourhood mainly did their shopping in Altona North, Altona Gate and Footscray. Most noted that price was an important factor that influenced their shopping. They also mentioned that shopping in Footscray gave them better access to a wider variety of food items.

The places where children said they and their families shopped included the Victoria & South Melbourne markets. They also patronised the local sweet shops! While some of their clothing was bought locally, they shopped "mainly at Highpoint and sometimes in the city and at the DFO [direct factory outlet]. Williamstown is generally more for adult clothes". Describing their shopping experience, some of the older participants at the consultation commented that "the shops and shopping area aren't geared up for older people".



On another tack, one parent spoke very positively about the local traders who provided employment for young people. “One [of my children] has a job at a local shop – it’s a good thing that local traders look after the local kids. Lots of my friends’ kids also have a local job.”

People in the consultations were asked about the local health services they used. A few attended doctors in Williamstown, “I tend to go wherever you don’t have to queue. It’s sometimes hard getting in at Williamstown - there’s long waiting lists” and “I use the local doctor and generally don’t have to wait, probably because it’s usually not urgent.” The hospital was also used occasionally, particularly for emergencies, and as one person said, “I hope that it stays”.

The library was another service used by residents. Parents of young children used both the library and the toy library. One parent with teenage children said “the kids use the local library and we’re looking forward to the new library – it will make it a lot more attractive and inviting”. One resident who used the library was more critical about the service. “I use the library less so now than I used to. It used to have reasonable stock but the range is not so good now. I support the library but it’s a pity that all the history books are reference books and so can’t be borrowed, and it has very small resources in it.”

People also talked about their involvement in social activities in Williamstown. As mentioned earlier, participants in the planned activity group (PAG) enjoyed the opportunity to socialise, especially those who had disabilities and were generally reliant on the support of a carer. For those still living with parents or who were in assisted living facilities, the PAG played an important role. Some residents were members of clubs, including the local RSL and the film society. Other social activities people attended were music events such as the Sounds of Summer festival or live music on offer in local pubs around Williamstown.

What things do you regularly do outside the neighbourhood?

Sport was an activity that many people participated in outside the Williamstown neighbourhood. In most instances, this happened in other parts of the Hobsons Bay or nearby municipalities. Both adults and school children said they played in team sports such as football, tennis, hockey and baseball and one child also attended training in gymnastics and swimming.

Shopping, as mentioned previously, was an activity regularly undertaken outside the neighbourhood. Among the most popular shopping destinations were the larger retail centres in the western suburbs and also central Melbourne, where people said they could obtain a wider variety of goods and where prices were sometimes lower.

A number of people who participated in the consultation used health services outside of Williamstown. People travelled to doctors and dentists in nearby suburbs or in areas where they had lived previously. In some instances, people travelled because they were keen to maintain relationships with a long-term health provider, while others noted the difficulty of getting appointments in Williamstown, particularly with doctors.

Several parents spoke about their children travelling to attend school outside the area. Another indicated that while her children attended local schools, she had a number of friends whose children travelled to schools in other parts of Melbourne. On the whole, the children who participated in the consultation indicated that they would be attending secondary schools in areas outside the municipality.



As to be expected, socialising was an activity that regularly occurred in other places, although this was sometimes due to a lack of local friendships and networks. According to one newer resident, “I don’t have many close friends or family here so that takes me away and if you don’t have children, you’re not in the school network”.

Getting about the neighbourhood.

Being a reasonably flat area and with mostly local traffic on the roads, Williamstown was considered to be a very walkable neighbourhood. Walking was regularly mentioned as an enjoyable and practical method for getting about and also for keeping fit. Residents talked about “walking to places to meet friends and because I don’t do a [large] weekly shop, it’s easy to walk”. Several young parents commented that walking was their preferred method for getting around Williamstown and that it was an easy place to get around with young children.

Others combined walking and cycling as transport options. “We cycle to the beach for a swim and catch the punt when it’s operating. Sometimes to supplement a big shop, we walk down to Douglas Parade. It would be more rare to take the car because I tend to buy little loads.”

Children from the local primary school used multiple transport methods for getting about. Most said they were rarely driven to school because they live close by and only went by car if it was too wet or they were running late. The majority of children walked to school and some also rode bikes, scooters or skated. While adults tended to see the roads as reasonably safe to navigate, children were concerned about traffic, especially buses, and as a result they “hardly ever ride on roads, only in quieter streets”. Those who cycled said they generally rode on paths, pointing out that they worried about hitting pedestrians. In terms of getting to after-school activities, the children said they usually walked or rode, but if they had a lot to carry or some distance to travel their parents drove them by car.

In the main, people who participated in the PAG consultation were elderly and had a disability. As a result, they tended to use taxis or were dropped off by car. One person, mentioned earlier, who despite needing a walking frame was an active walker as a means for getting about and keeping active.

A number of people spoke about being regular public transport users. “I use public transport two or three times a week but I walk to Newport to get the train [rather than Williamston station] because you’re on two lines. I wouldn’t drive the car to the city.” The changeover at Newport station, in order to catch the Williamstown train, was a disincentive to one person. “The introduction of a train shuttle meant changing trains at Newport [to connect with the Williamstown train] and discouraged me from using it. I didn’t like waiting by myself at Newport, at night.”

While safety and regularity of services were issues for some public transport users, others said they would “like to use it more but it comes down to cost – it’s more expensive than driving and it makes it prohibitive.” People also mentioned public transport “services don’t generally run where I need them”. Students in the ESL classes felt that access to public transport was generally good, although buses on the Sunshine to Williamstown route tended to be unreliable.

Amongst those who worked reasonably close to home, transport options varied. Car use was common, but was often substituted with walking or riding a bike either on the road or on shared pathways when they were available.

What would make Williamstown a better place

Public infrastructure in Williamstown was identified as needing attention. According to one person “the condition of footpaths and crossings is pretty poor. The roads are potholed and cracked. It doesn’t affect me now but for older people there are a lot of trip hazards. Crossing some busy roads has got better but crossing in areas like Willie Road is difficult – there probably should be more refuges (traffic islands). The school crossing [in Williamstown Road] has the only set of lights”. The standard of footpaths was also an issue for children. “I really don’t like the footpaths. They’re bumpy and cracked and have broken glass all over them” ...“if you’re on a scooter or rollerblades your wheels get stuck in the cracks”.

Better information about Williamstown and the local services was cited by a newer resident to the neighbourhood as an area for improvement. “I found it very hard to find things out when I first came. I asked the Council if I could go onto a mailing list to receive information about local happenings but there wasn’t one. I still get the local newsletter from where I used to live and I can’t believe the difference – it’s informative about what’s happening and it’s in three languages. I also asked at Council for a resident’s kit and was disappointed that there wasn’t one. We need good community information.”

A lack of doctors in the area was raised by a cross section of residents, resulting in long waiting lists for appointments or in some cases having to travel to other areas to visit a doctor. According to one newer resident, “Initially, I was horrified that there was no community health centre. I then looked for a female doctor and rang around six surgeries and was told that ‘you’ll never get onto female [doctors] books because they’re all closed’ - so I’m still travelling to my previous doctor”.

Some transport issues, particularly public transport, have already been mentioned. Along with better access to public transport, the provision of a community bus was identified as lacking. “A community bus would mean older people could get down the street to shop - it would keep them independent.”

Despite feeling that the geography of Williamstown buffered the neighbourhood from passing traffic, residents who worked elsewhere and travelled by car were concerned about traffic congestion. The gridlock of getting on and off the Westgate Bridge was mentioned. Although the bridge does not fall within the neighbourhood boundary, it is the major road link to the CBD and the south east. Residents also felt that congestion on the Westgate Freeway was getting progressively worse and those who worked in places with poor links to public transport noted that there was no alternative but to use the bridge.

Along with traffic congestion, residents had a number of concerns about the impact of Williamstown’s growing popularity as a place to live. “My husband grew up in Hobsons Bay and it was his dream to live in Williamstown, however he is concerned about the need to upgrade infrastructure to meet increased demand.” People also noted a need to manage this change in order to protect what made the area. “Williamstown has changed – it’s more popular and also more expensive and this has changed the feel of the place. There has been inappropriate development, particularly along the Strand where there are only a few of the original houses left.”

This tension of managing development and the change it brings was also highlighted by those who had lived in the area for a long time. “I lived here before it became upmarket. I don’t like what’s happened along the Strand – there are some [housing] monstrosities. Planning regulations seems to be inconsistent. People with money get what they want.” Some older residents felt there was

sometimes a lack of respect for “what’s already here and those who have lived here a long time” among the neighbourhood’s newer residents.

When asked what would make Williamstown a better place to live, one resident commented, “I’d like less tourists. They put demands on the local infrastructure, the parks get trashed, it’s hard to get into restaurants. The associated costs fall on the ratepayers. Traffic congestion on the weekends is bad. On nice days, traffic can be bumper to bumper. Might be part of the reason why locals don’t drive.”

Several safety concerns were raised by residents. Poor street lighting was identified as a hazard to people’s mobility and getting around the area, especially at night. For parents with young children, playground safety was important and they suggested better fencing and shading of playgrounds and parks were required.

Parents also expressed a need for better access to childcare and were concerned about long waiting lists at some centres. One working parent who wanted her child to attend a childcare centre that was collocated with a kindergarten had waited for three years for a place at the centre.

Participants in the consultation said they would like to see more diversity in the shopping centre. They talked about wanting a wider range in terms of prices, commenting that Williamstown “tends to be geared around money but poverty is there and it’s a fairly expensive place for shopping”. People also wanted a better mix of shops to suit the full age spectrum.

The state of the physical environment was a high priority among school students and they felt there was room for improvement. “Some areas look really nice and some areas just look horrible, there’s graffiti and the grass is dead”. They also talked about the neglect of land along the railway tracks where “there’s lots of rubbish.”

The children were also concerned about public behaviour and the impact of vandalism, speeding cars “they’re really annoying”, and “hoons walking around late at night in summer and starting fights”.



Source: Railway tracks, photo by Williamtown Primary School student

Residents memories

One man in his 70s, who has been a long term resident of Hobsons Bay and Williamstown, spoke about having worked as a blacksmith at the former Williamstown dockyards for more than 40 years. He reminisced about how shipbuilding had changed over that time and how ships “used to be built from the ground- up” at the dockyards. He’d seen major changes in the shipbuilding process with the introduction of new technologies and the off-site manufacturing of component parts. This had resulted in the loss of jobs and had had a great impact on the neighbourhood as many of these workers were also local residents.

As previously mentioned, some people in the consultation were somewhat amused about changes in the general perception of Williamstown. They remembered the area being referred to as “an old folks home” and as “a dump”. One long term resident talked about the negative reaction of friends



when told he was going to live in Williamstown. “They asked me why and if I knew what I was doing.” Several people commented that “if you lived in Williamstown you were looked down upon” but that this view had changed considerably and Williamstown was now seen as a desirable place to live.

Staying in Williamstown

There were a variety of responses as to whether people planned to live in Williamstown for the foreseeable future. For some, the thought of leaving was not an option to consider, “Nothing would make me move”. It was clear people had strong feelings about and commitment to Williamstown. “I see myself in Williamstown forever. I’d be broken hearted if I had to leave” and similarly, “I think I’m cemented. I wouldn’t leave if I stayed living in the city – I wouldn’t move to another suburb”.

One parent of young children indicated that while they were keen to stay in Williamstown, the future education of their children might mean leaving the area if they selected schools in other locations. Another parent had “no intentions of leaving” and said she loved the environment, that it was close to family and friends and she felt the area had all that was required to meet her family’s current and future needs.

One person who had been a resident for several years was pragmatic about staying in Williamstown. “It suits us at the moment. We didn’t buy a small house or a large one. Eventually it might get too large so we might have to down size again but I don’t know if that would be here.”

Choosing to remain in Williamstown had not been an option for a former resident who reflected on why she had reluctantly left Williamstown to live in another suburb. “I couldn’t afford to buy and I couldn’t afford the rent increases”.

Children who participated in the consultation generally felt that their parents liked the area and had no plans to move. One spoke confidently about his family staying put, “When we moved from Newport my mum hated the move and she’s not too keen to move again”.

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