

The Hemmings Street Precinct Action Plan

Community Consultation 2020 Findings

Hemmings Street Precinct Perceptions of Safety Survey and Consultation

This summary outlines the findings of responses to a Perceptions of Local Safety Survey (POLs) conducted in late 2020 of 210 people who live, work, conduct business, provide community or other services, pass through, visit or shop in the Hemmings Street Precinct.

The POLs asked participants about their beliefs of personal safety in the Precinct during the day and evening, explored specific safety concerns, sought views about key directions in the draft-version of the Hemmings Street Precinct Action Plan proposed by Council, and invited suggestions about further measures which might improve safety and amenity.

Survey Participants

Amongst the 210 POLs participants:

- 54% were women, 45.5% men and 0.5% (one individual) of another gender
- Most (70%) were aged 25-64 years, with 27% over 64 and the balance of 3%, aged 15-25 years
- Participants' association with the Precinct included:
 - Most (70%) are living in the Precinct
 - Nearly a third (31%) shop in it, and the same proportion visit
 - Lesser numbers have a business (9%) or work (6%) in the Precinct.

Feelings of Personal Safety when in the Hemmings Street Precinct

- Approximately half (47%) of survey participants, including similar numbers of women and men, stated they **did not feel safe** in the Hemmings Street Precinct **during the day**
- Nearly one-third (29%) agreed that they '*always*' or '*often*' avoided coming to the Precinct during the day, owing to concerns for their personal safety
- Nearly four-fifths (79%) of participants, including similar proportions of women and men, agreed that they **did not feel safe** in the Precinct **at night**.
- Seventy per cent of female survey participants and just over half (54%) of men, agreed that they '*always*' or '*often*' avoided coming to the Hemmings Street Precinct at night, due to such concerns.

Key Safety Issues Perceived in the Hemmings Street Precinct

In response to questions about perceptions of key issues and conditions which influence safety in the Hemmings Street Precinct, respondents cited the following:

Social Concerns/Anti-social Behaviour

- Incidents of public and family violence in the street, and other anti-social behaviour
- People with assumed mental health issues acting strangely in public, people entering private gardens
- Beggars causing distractions and barriers to the flow of pedestrian traffic.

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

- Drug use, alcohol consumption and drug dealing in public places
- Other public alcohol consumption and related intoxicated people in public.

Street-based Sex Work

- Street sex workers, men driving around searching for them, sex occurring on private property
- Harassment of women by men driving around seeking sex workers.

Theft and Burglary

- Theft of and from vehicles and registration number plates
- House burglaries, and stolen mail from vandalised mailboxes
- People accosting pedestrians, demanding property, phones and/or money
- Traffic and parking issues, housing and amenity – including dumped rubbish.

Excessive Noise

- Cars creating excessive engine, passenger and radio noise
- Women screaming and intrusive noise from other properties at night
- Fighting and shouting in the street.

Housing and Homelessness

- Perceived anti-social behaviour in public by Precinct rooming house tenants
- Badly managed, neglected, overcrowded and/or unregistered rooming houses
- Squatters living in derelict houses, perceived associated crime and/or anti-social behaviour
- Other persons assumed to be homeless staying in public places in the Precinct.

Traffic

- Limited residential parking
- High-speed, high-risk driving, and increased traffic
- Traffic congestion and bottlenecks in specific locations
- Dumped and or unregistered cars left on streets for long periods, assumed at times by mechanics.

Amenity

- An overall unsanitary and ill-kept appearance
- Poorly maintained properties and nature strips
- Property vandalism
- Hard rubbish dumping on nature strips
- Litter.

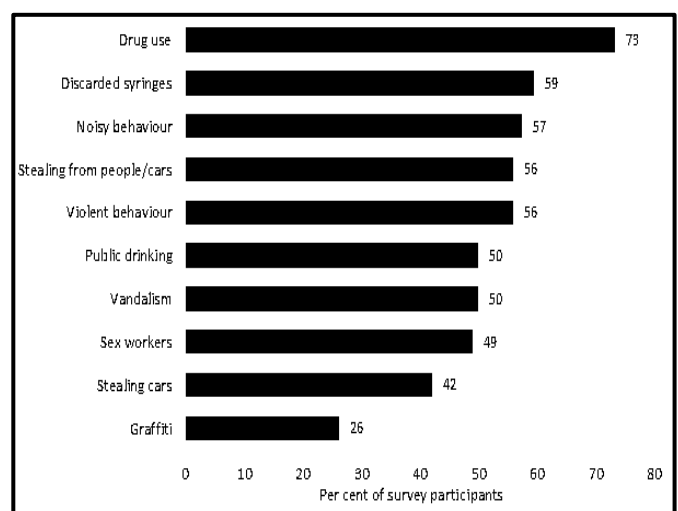
Street Lighting

- Poor street and laneway lighting impacting people's decisions to walk the around the Precinct and/or to public facilities, food and entertainment venues in central Dandenong, particularly in the evening and night.

Major Concerns About Safety

Major concerns about safety and amenity in the Precinct were analysed and:

- Nearly three-quarters of respondents identified '*drug use*', and over half nominated '*discarded syringes*', '*noisy behaviour*', '*stealing*' and '*violent behaviour*' (see diagram to right)
- There were no marked differences between the percentage of women and men about these concerns.



Feedback on the Hemmings Street Precinct Draft-Action Plan Priority Areas

Consultative questions on each draft-Plan priority area requested respondents to indicate if they supported the action and/or had any suggestions or concerns. A summary of key responses follows:

Proposed Priority One: Increasing Neighbourhood Watch Support, Membership and Involvement

Supportive Suggestions

- Council should provide support to reach CALD communities and information in other languages
- Residents need a point-of-contact for reporting crime and anti-social behaviour
- Residents still require pro-active Police involvement in preventing and responding to crime.

Concerns

- By emphasising community action to prevent crime, it shifts responsibility for safety onto residents
- This is unlikely to be effective, based on previous experience with Neighbourhood Watch
- Neighbourhood Watch does not have the means to address the problems of the Precinct
- Increased policing is required, rather than community development
- Neighbourhood Watch is made up of largely elderly English-speaking members and many residents are not, instead speaking languages other than English
- People are largely fearful and may therefore not get involved in Plan activities.

Priority Two: Arts and Cultural Events

Supportive Suggestions

- Events are likely to encourage community involvement
- Perhaps a street parade or barbeque; market day; and family friendly events
- Events could be conducted to mark cultural celebrations: Easter, Christmas, ethnic cultural events
- Activities should also aim to engage local young people
- Opportunities should be included to become acquainted with local Police
- Events/activities should be promoted with posters and in languages other than English
- The local Primary School should be involved and utilised as a meeting/planning point.

Concerns

- The effect of events/activities to improve perceptions and levels of safety might be minimal and would not address underlying causes of crime
- Arts-oriented activities are unlikely to influence levels of crime and safety
- Creative events would be more effective if lead by artists, not Council or Police.

Priority Three: Introducing a Mobile CCTV Camera System and a Visual Messaging Board (VMS)

Supportive Suggestions

- Increased CCTV will help to prevent crime
- Cameras should be permanently installed
- Police should also patrol the Precinct.

Concerns

- CCTV is useful only after an incident, which does not help the victim at the time of the event
- CCTV has not proven to increase actual safety, only perceptions of safety
- CCTV cameras and VMS are expensive to install and maintain and are vulnerable to vandalism
- CCTV cameras are already installed in/near the shops and have not resolved issues
- Current portable signs [VMS] uses words that some don't understand
- This is not an adequate approach.

Priority Four: Advocacy for Funding of Safety Initiatives

Supportive Suggestions

- Government funding would help improve conditions in the Precinct
- It's important that any grant funding be spent responsibly
- It's good to work on safety at all levels
- Local people should be consulted about these efforts or resulting programs.

Concerns

- The Government may not be willing to help
- The proposed Plan is vague and lacks specifics
- It is unclear what impact the proposed Plan would have.

Other Suggested Measures to Improve Hemmings Street Precinct Safety

Survey respondents were invited to offer suggestions about further measures which might reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the Precinct. One-hundred and twenty-five specific comments, largely concerned the following:

Safety Measures

- More frequent Police patrols
- Police more responsive to calls from residents about anti-social behaviour
- Improved police responsiveness to calls from residents
- Improved street lighting.

Addressing Underlying Issues

- Poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, alcohol and drug addiction
- Provide activities for young people
- Make services affordable.

Housing Issues

- The provision of less social housing and rooming houses in the Precinct
- Removal of vacant properties, which otherwise attract squatters
- Fewer flats and townhouses and more separate houses, to attract homeowners
- Hold estate agents/welfare agencies responsible for behaviour of their tenants.

Business Support

- Support for local businesses
- Efforts to attract cafes and other shops into the Precinct to improve amenity and community activity.

Improved Amenity

- Improved cleaning of streets and removal of dumped rubbish
- Installation of disability parking next to the shops.

Community Engagement

- Provision of information about safety and other issues for the community, including cultural groups.