

N³²¹⁴ORLANE
COMMUNITY
INITIATIVES

Community Engagement &
Consultation



LABUAN SQUARE REDEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

What were the intentions?

The areas of Norlane and Corio, located in the north of the city of Geelong, are overwhelmingly places where people live, learn, play and form communities. Most of the area is zoned for residential and public recreation use and provides sought after affordable housing in close proximity to a range of employment opportunities, community services, transport infrastructure and a vibrant major retail activity centre. The area is also within easy commuting distance to metropolitan Melbourne. The 2012 Corio Norlane Structure Plan was commissioned by the City of Greater Geelong and the Department of Planning and Community Development. The vision statement in the plan outlined the aims of the project: “To transform Corio and Norlane into a thriving and connected community where people choose to live, work and invest.” One of the key initiatives outlined in the structure plan was to renew local shopping centres. Labuan Square is located in Norlane, between the major landmarks of the North Shore train station, Forster Street and the former Ford Factory site on North Shore Road. It was specifically targeted in the 2012 plan as a precinct that was to be upgraded and developed for residents’ use (Principle 4, Action 4.1, p.46)

The City of Greater Geelong (the City) approved funding for the redevelopment of Labuan Square, Norlane in the 2019/20 budget with \$250,000 set aside for improvements. To inform a design for this redevelopment, the City partnered with Norlane Community Initiatives (NCI) to engage with stakeholders and the local community to identify the community’s vision and aspirations for the site.

The community engagement was very successful with a high volume of feedback from our community. This positive response reinforces the approach of engaging community on multiple fronts and utilising established networks from within a local neighbourhood. The response also indicates the high regard, commitment, and value the community places on Labuan Square, and subsequently justifies the need to invest in its redevelopment.

This report will summarise Norlane Community Initiatives (NCI) community engagement methods, survey findings and provide key recommendations.

ENGAGEMENT

How did we engage with community?

NCI's community engagement strategy was informed by best practice in community development theory – “nothing about us, without us.” The community engagement process had the overarching aim of taking place in a way that was organic, participatory, and informed by local residents. It was also informed by the City's Community Engagement Policy. It was important to consider reasonable adjustment to ensure inclusion of residents who may not have had access to private transportation or internet connectivity, issues which have been identified as particular to the suburb of Norlane in past community surveys (Savage, Mead & Taket, 2007).

In order to fulfill these requirements, three different levels of engagement were undertaken for community members:

- Local community members (6) were recruited and trained to be community surveyors and attended a 1 hour planning/training session to upskill them in identifying relevant community networks, engaging in discussion with survey participants and how to collect data. This approach aimed to recognise the inherent strengths of local networks and local residents as de facto experts in Norlane.
- A letterbox drop of postcards advertising an online survey at residences within a 5km radius from Labuan Square. Hard copies of these surveys were also distributed at local events that NCI oversees, such as community meals on Monday nights, and to residents identified by community surveyors as in need of additional support.
- A listening post was planned for Labuan square to engage with residents and users of the retail area, staffed by trained community surveyors. This post was originally planned to run for 3 days, but due to local COVID-19 restrictions, only ran for one day.



Community researchers setting up listening post 2021

Survey Development

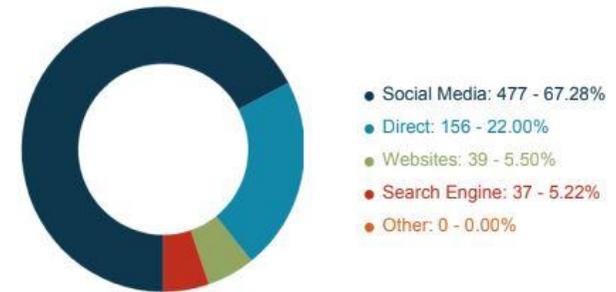
The survey instrument was developed by NCI in consultation with the City and modified to allow hosting on the council's online survey portal. The instrument was based on prior consultation of the Norlane community and had the dual effect of acknowledging community voice having been heard while also being mindful of current City policies and plans. Questions were a mix between closed ended questions to gather demographic information on residents, questions that allowed participants to rank preferences in order and open-ended questions that elicited their vision for a redeveloped Labuan Square. The survey was hosted online for a total of four weeks between the 3rd and 31st of May 2021. In

that time, 787 page visits were recorded, with 178 contributions made, and 49 people choosing to ‘follow’ the page, which meant they would be notified of outcomes from the survey analysis. This was on par with other community feedback surveys hosted by the City.

In addition to this, the survey was posted on social media sites (e.g. Facebook), and any comments downloaded and considered in light of the comments on the main feedback website. Analysis of these results confirmed that they mirrored the general tone and content of the primary data.

Data Analysis

Complete data sets were downloaded from the hosting website. Quantitative data, including demographics, was examined by two researchers, then combined and reported as percentages. Two main questions from the survey encouraged participants to enter free-text comments – these were ‘What would encourage you to visit [Labuan Square] more often?’ and ‘What is your vision for a redeveloped Labuan Square?’



All free-text comments were first deidentified by removing names and other identifying information, then transferred to analytic software and analysed to identify any common or important themes. The authors read through the comments a number of times to familiarise themselves with the feedback and start to identify reoccurring themes. Themes that were particularly noticeable or particularly frequent were grouped together in ‘nodes’, and a description of each node was made. Coding of themes was undertaken sentence by sentence, and comments were considered to sit across as many different themes as were represented in their content. Once grouped, comments were examined again within each theme to identify if there were sub-themes that emerged. For example, all comments relating the landscaping features of Labuan Square were grouped together, and then this group was considered as a whole to see if individual sub-themes could be generated. The researcher described each sub-theme using language that was consistent with the tone and style of the comments – for example, referring to the commercial elements of the square as ‘shops’.

Under the question ‘What is your vision for a redeveloped Labuan Square?’, 11 main themes were identified, with 374 unique sentences coded. Under the question ‘What would make you visit Labuan Square more often?’, 22 main themes were identified, with 471 unique sentences coded. All main themes were then grouped into two categories – those comments that related to the scope of the **landscape redevelopment** of Labuan Square budgeted by the City, and those that related to **possible future development**.

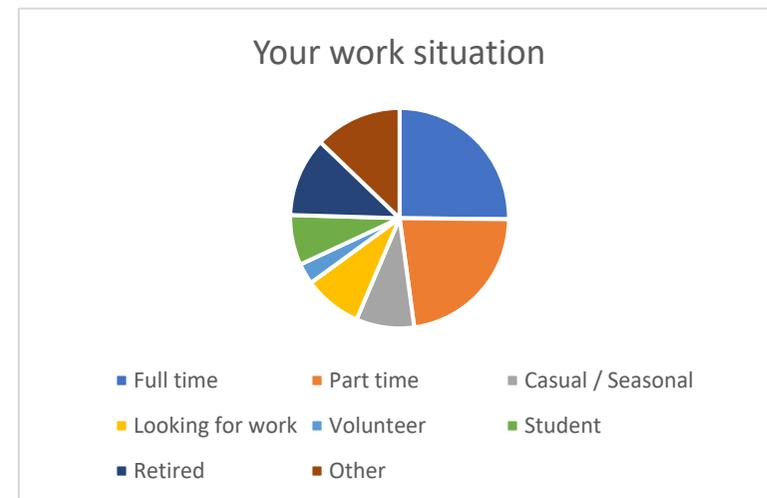
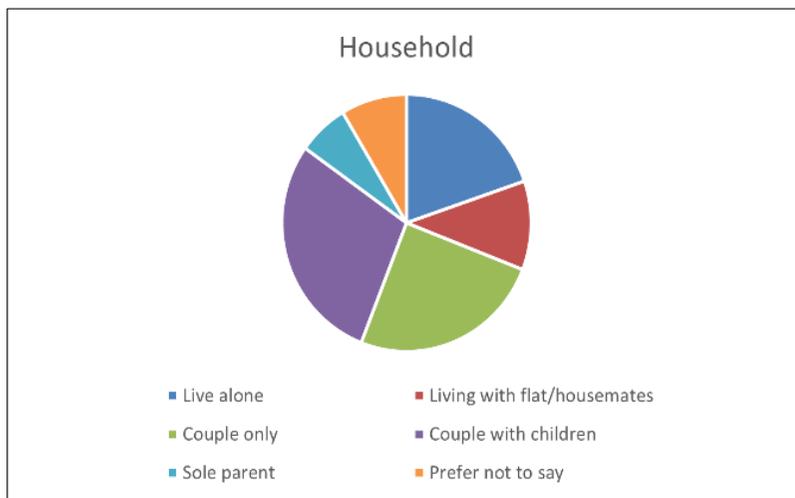
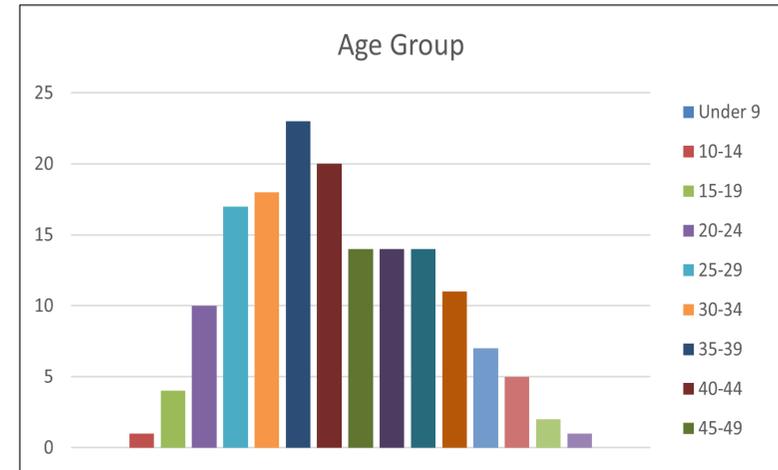
Note: Some survey questions were changed shortly after (Monday, 10th May) submissions opened to better capture feedback:

- How do you travel to Labuan Square? Was changed to: How do you mostly travel to Labuan Square?
- What is your relationship to Labuan Square? was changed to: What is your main relationship to Labuan Square?
- The following two questions were changed so that people could select multiple responses:
 - What are their ages (children)?
 - What features do you value at Labuan Square?

PARTICIPANTS

Who did we hear from?

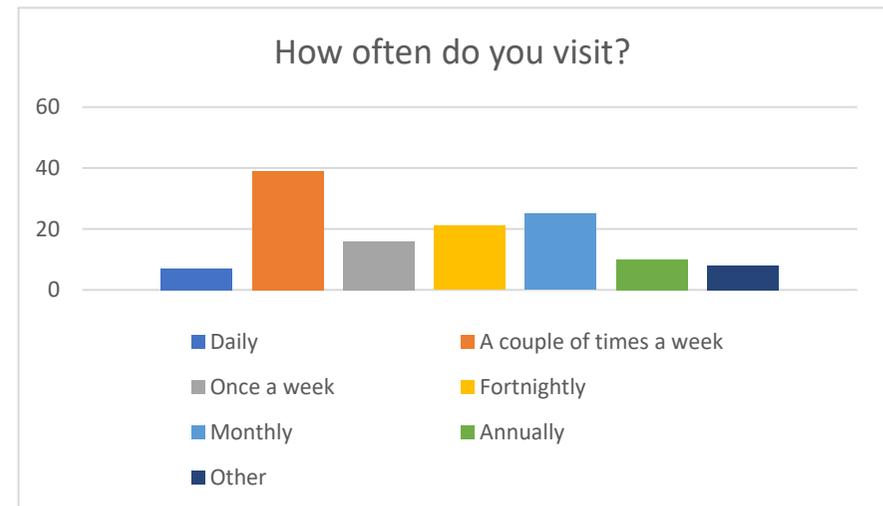
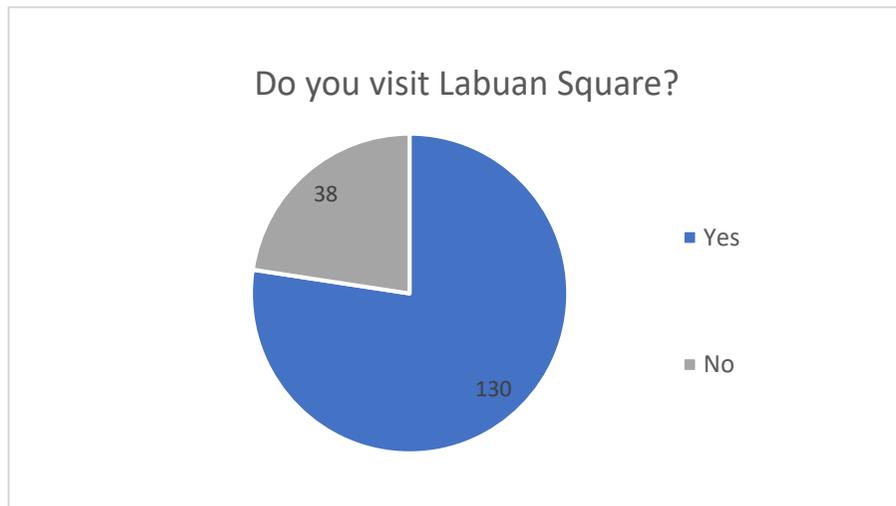
Participants demographic information was used to see if we had reached and received a good response (sample) from across different groups in our community. Overall engagement captured feedback from a broad range of residents and others who have a connection to Labuan Square either because they used to live close by or visit family and friends in the neighbourhood. Submissions were received from a range of age groups, household and employment/work situations.



CONNECTION

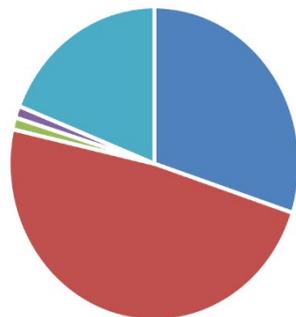
What is your connection to Labuan Square?

We received a good response from those who currently visit Labuan Square and found out how often they visit. We were also interested in making sure we received submissions from longer term and newer residents to hear both their views. The feedback included those who live close by as they mostly walk to Labuan Square as well as those who drive.

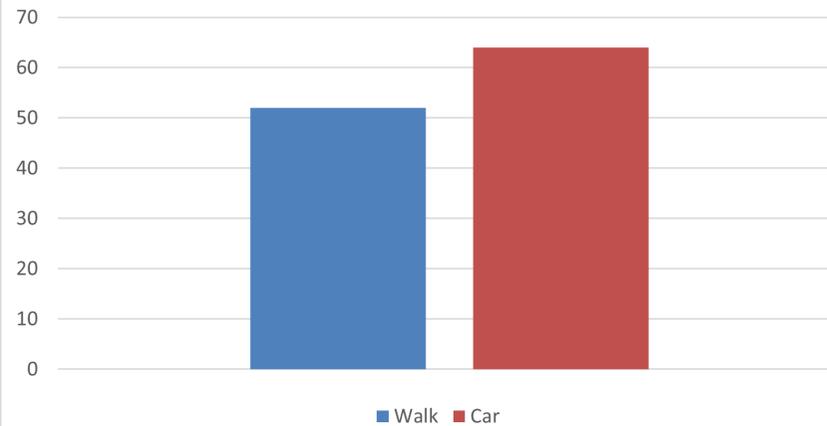


What is your main relationship to Labuan Square?

- Local resident (less than 5 years)
- Local resident (more than 5 years)
- Worker
- Trader
- Other



How do you mostly travel to Labuan Square?



Why do you visit Labuan Square?

Almost 100 submissions answered this question with the majority listing specific shops they attend or for shopping in general. Residents and visitors to the area obviously value what is already available as they meet their current needs. The top responses are Chemist (38), Post Office (29), Supermarket (31), and the Fish & Chip shop (22). The Medical/Doctors service, Finn's BBQ, Bottle Shop, and Laundromat were also mentioned.

'Other' replies were varied from picking fruit, playing Pokémon Go, as a market-place meeting spot, destination for a walk or because it was convenient being close-by, supporting local businesses, as a support worker taking clients shopping or just to be social.

Some residents (8) though mentioned shops they used to visit before they were closed. These answers were amplified in the follow up questions which asked, 'What would encourage you to visit more often?' and the Vision question where many submissions wrote in more detail about shops which used to operate at Labuan Square, but which have closed in recent years eg. Café, Bakery, Op Shop.

Why don't you visit Labuan Square?

These submissions (35) answered why they don't currently visit Labuan Square and were also elaborated on in more detail in the last two open-ended questions. Reasons suggested are:

- Appearance – doesn't look / seem / feel safe or inviting eg. empty, closed shops; people hanging around; graffiti; run-down
- Doesn't meet their needs eg. Shops previously visited have closed; None that they use; Have moved away



Welcome sign at Labuan Square. 2020

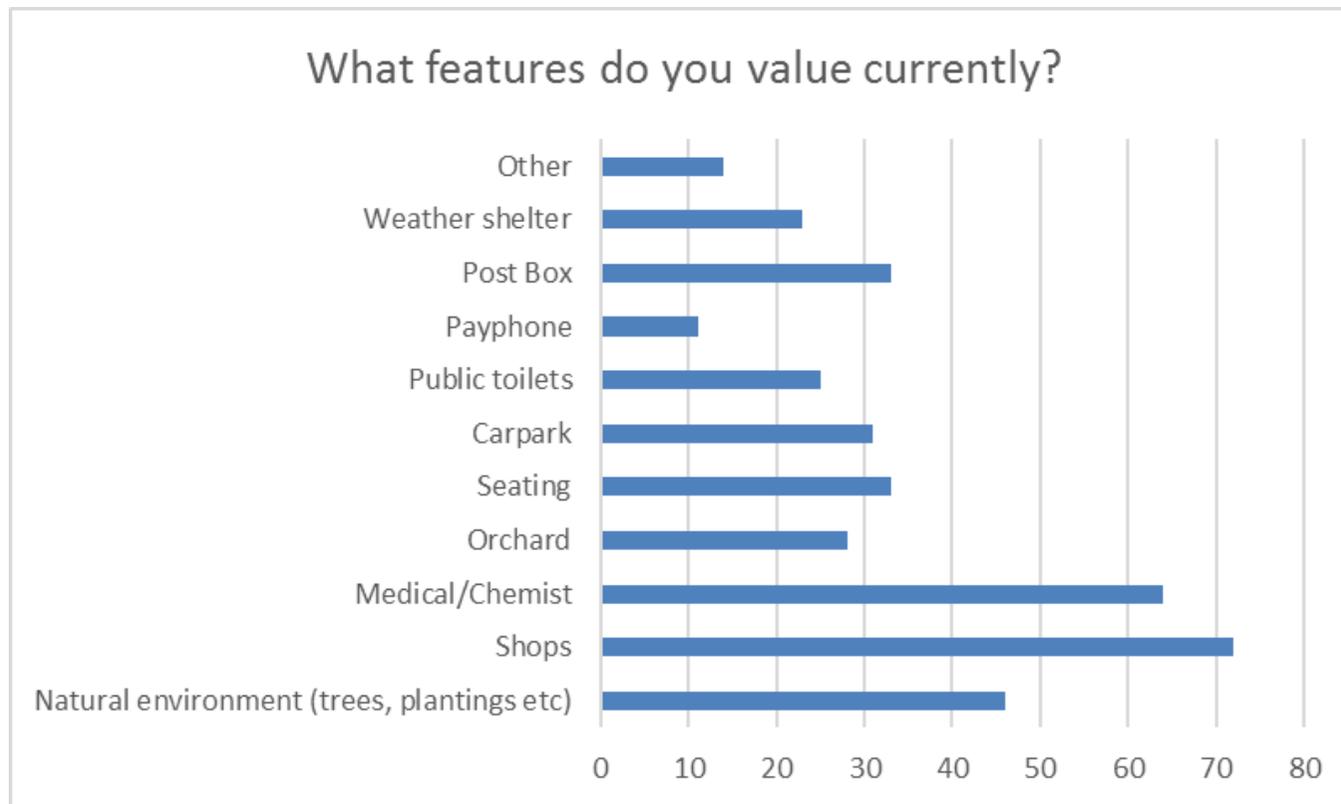
Which features do you value at Labuan Square currently?

The existing shops and medical/chemist are valued highly by residents and visitors alike. As can be seen in further questions, these services are meeting the needs of residents. (*Refer note page 5)

The current natural environment is also appreciated and updating the central landscape ranks highest as first option for redevelopment with the funding currently available.

Other reasons were varied such as “all of the above” and “I like the design of Labuan Square with its central courtyard”.

It’s also worth noting “that local and national calls to standard fixed line numbers and calls to standard Australian mobiles on [Telstra’s public payphones are now free](#)”. This welcome news came after community engagement and may increase usage.



REDEVELOPMENT

In the redevelopment of Labuan Square, you ranked the following features in order of priority

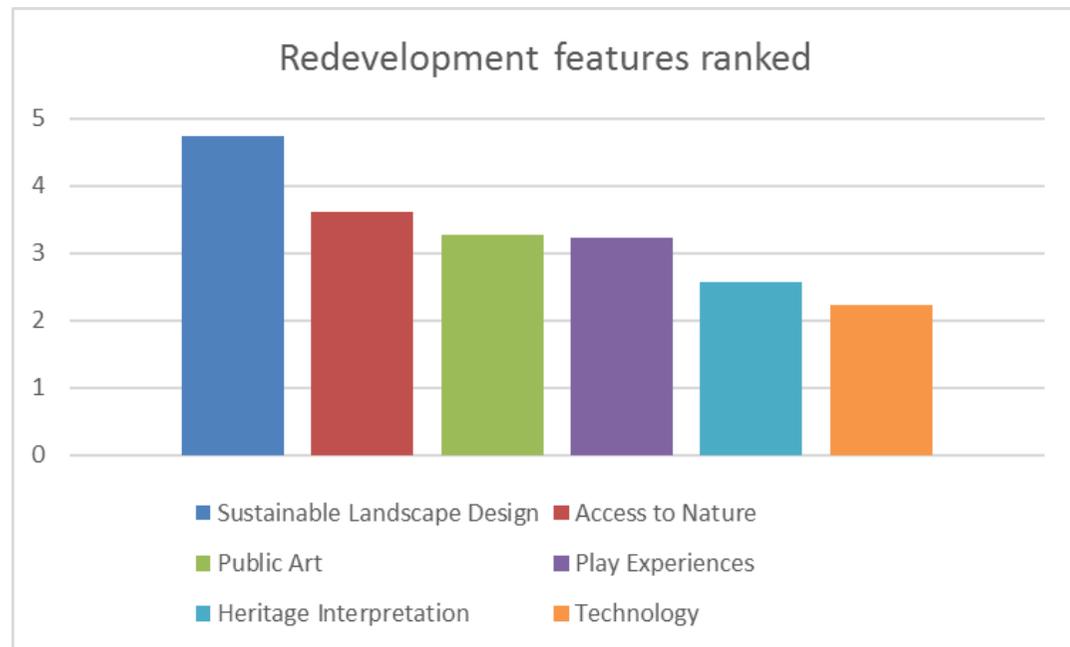
Sustainable landscape design and Access to Nature both ranged highest from choices available with shorter term funding. Public art listed next, closely followed by play experiences.

There were 154 answers to this question. 54 of those submissions were from families with children and their age groups to help with designing the public space included:

0 – 4 years old	24
5 – 11 years old	33
12 – 18 years old	23
Over 18	16

Overall you told us that there were 4 main areas of importance to consider in the proposed redevelopment:

1. Sustainable landscaping and access to nature
2. Activating the shops
3. Appearance
4. Events and activities



Sustainable Landscaping & Access to Nature

The natural environment scored highly for this redevelopment, and it was made known to us that the trees should not be removed.

What did you say could be improved?

- Address elements that divide the middle of the square by opening it up
- Seating, tables and shelter for families
- A rotunda to tie in with community events

What ideas did you have?

- Increase trees, greenery and garden bed numbers – “Soften Its Stark Image”
- Fence off or separate garden beds to prevent people walking on them
- Community members generally value the fruit trees/orchard and would like to see it cared for and extended, possibly with grass underneath it so fruit does not go to waste.
- Preference for native/Indigenous plants, if possible, along with edible herbs
- A water fountain for filling bottles from or for display purposes
- Make it attractive for open air dining experiences
- Malop Street and Market Square were often cited as offering a similar feel to what residents want
- A preference for natural materials, soft lines and colour



Community Orchard at Labuan Square

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritise current funding towards landscaping design and works
2. Engage a landscape architect with expertise in sustainable urban landscaping who can deliver with a brief on natural materials, soft lines and color
3. Develop community activation plan that incorporates participation and usage of the spaces

Activating the shops

Almost all responses from people who currently visit Labuan Square appreciate and use the existing retail and service outlets. They go here because it is close-by so is more convenient than travelling to the larger shopping centres. The following were mentioned many times – Chemist, Supermarket, Medical / Doctor's, Post Office and Take-a-way.

What did you say could be improved?

A mix of essential and variety shops/services. Many responses indicated they would also appreciate other shops like:

- Bakery
- Fresh Fruit & Veg
- Op-Shop
- Café with outdoor tables

All of these suggestions have operated here previously but are missed. A White-Goods Repair and Plaster Art Supply shop are opening soon.

“Not enough variety to draw people in - the community wants a village type feel”

What ideas did you have?

We need different shops

- Not enough shop variety to draw people in
- Shops that service the immediate needs of the community are a particular focus – such as community training and education providers
- Shops mentioned include a butcher, a bakery, a supermarket, newsagent, an op-shop, florist, milk bar, fruit and vegetable shop and a cafe with coffee and takeaway
- Concerns about the suitability of alcohol sales if aiming for a family friendly type hub

Activating the shops (cont)

We need to attract new types of businesses

- Encourage businesses to stay open and invest in the square
- Address high rental prices of shop spaces, low rent or subsidised rent periods, reduce barriers to entry
- Assist shop owners with presentation of shops
- Attract community/non-profit groups
- Provide grants for social enterprises to establish a multi-cultural dining precinct



Labuan Square 1960. Courtesy of Walker Family

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Investigate what options are available for the City of Greater Geelong to affect shop tenancy when buildings are privately owned.
5. Facilitate traders group and provide support through councils economic development team
6. Repair and improve signage on site and directional signage on Princess Hwy and Station Street
7. Develop a promotional campaign to advertise the opportunities provided by the square
8. Raise local awareness of the difference between City owned public space and private ownership of buildings/shops
9. Long term community activation plan that incorporates economic revitalisation strategies

Appearance

Many submissions talked about times past when Labuan Square was a hive of activity. The appearance of Labuan Square from the South end is more inviting than the North (Forster Street) partially from closed shops this end. Many residents responded saying the precinct looks uninviting and run-down.

What did you say could be improved?

- Lighting
- Discourage anti-social behaviour

What ideas did you have?

Family & Child Friendly

- Kid friendly play space that can be easily supervised by parents
- Play equipment that cannot be vandalised
- Spaces for elderly to interact – seating and tables with built in games, grassed space for bocce
- Parents room in the public toilets
- Open and accessible for members of the public with disabilities. Some shop doorways are difficult to access



Labuan Square at night. 2021

Appearance (cont).

Feeling Safe

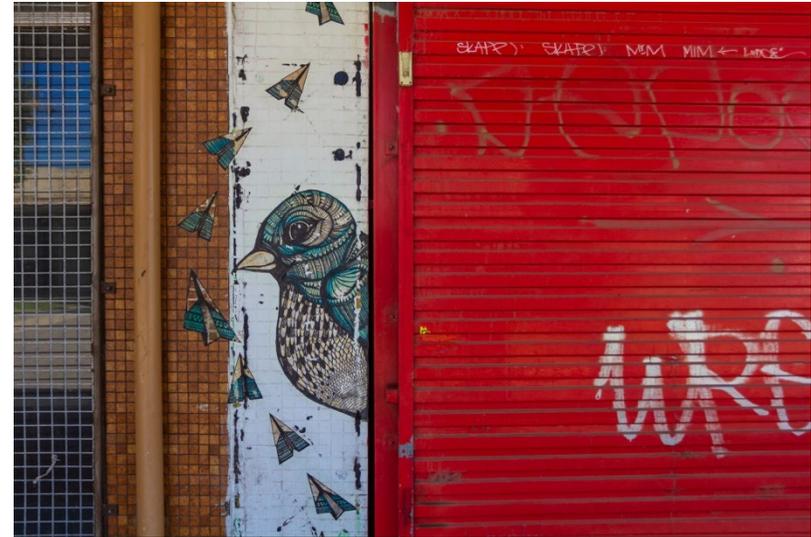
- CCTV surveillance
- 24/7 police presence
- Hired security staff
- Reinforcing of the no public consumption of alcohol rules
- Metal gates/grilles at each end of the square

Cleaner

- Removal of dumped rubbish
- Cleaning of public toilets
- Emptying of rubbish bins regularly
- Recycling bins
- Cleaning of drains and gutters
- Cigarette poles

Brighter

- Mural or street style art on building
- Colour or brighten the metal roller doors
- Some concern that artwork would be vandalized or destroyed – involvement of local artists?



Shopfront with artwork from 2010

“Attract cafes and shops that will make families feel that is a place that they can regularly attend”

Appearance (cont).

Updated

- Rejuvenated, modern feel
- Walkway covering and awnings to be updated
- Upgraded shop fronts
- Vibrant and bright colours – a welcoming feel
- Some infrastructure needs upgrading – bricks repointed, roofing

“Cleaner more modern toilets and somewhere to fill my drink bottle up as I cycle around locally a lot”



Forster Street View 2020

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

10. Prioritise current funding towards public art and play experiences
11. Develop an education campaign to inform users of the existing services provided by council to assist with site appearance (ie. bins, graffiti, repairs)
12. Conduct a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) assessment on the site
13. Prioritise toilet upgrade and change of location
14. Work with shop owners and services to upgrade shopfronts
15. Long term community activation plan that incorporates participation to continue community capacity to ‘care for the square’

Events & Activities

Most suggestions in this category involve working with local groups and organisations to make better use of the public space whether one-off events or regular activities such as music, swap meets and markets.

What did you say could be improved?

- More events and activities for people, especially families and children
- How the public space is used in general

“Small garden areas at either end with rotunda in the centre of the square to allow for entertainment and music”

What ideas did you have?

Events/Activities (Either regular or one-off)

- Foster community by making the space usable for community events
- Live music, buskers
- Markets, car boot sales or community swap meets
- Workshops or community groups installed in shop fronts

Events & Activities (cont)

Community groups

- Involvement of local community or not-for-profit groups
- Social enterprise cafe or community kitchen
- Education and general interest programs ran through partnership with local neighbourhood houses



Crafty: Laura Alice and her team prepare woolly art pieces to decorate Labuan Square. Photo: LEANNE CHURCHILL

Newspaper article of activities at Labuan Square. 2010

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

16. Landscape design to include space for performance or public events or activities
17. Community noticeboard for events and sharing information in a non-digital manner
18. Raise awareness of events, activities, services, and organisations already operating within the vicinity of Labuan Square
19. Community activation plan that incorporates events and usage promotion strategies

COMMUNITY VISION

The broad community vision is for Labuan Square to again be a vibrant, green, attractive, friendly, accessible, and safe public space for our neighbourhood with a mix of essential and specialty shops, cafés or eateries, services, and activities – a community hub.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical insight from our research identified the importance of Labuan Square for Norlane, both as a hub for community benefit and social connection. This involves both short term infrastructure needs being addressed and rectified, as well as developing a long-term engagement and activation plan to cultivate Labuan square as a community hub. Without a long-term plan in place and a willingness to develop local leadership and ownership of Labuan Square's future, it is highly likely that the broader vision for Labuan Square will not be realised. Our major recommendations (below) address this and encourage the City and other key stakeholders to invest in the long-term aspirations for developing Labuan Square as outlined by the extensive and important community feedback captured in this report.

Major Recommendations

1. Labuan Square redevelopment and revitalisation project becomes recognised as a **high priority project** in Norlane and key contributor towards neighbourhood regeneration
2. Identify and prioritise current funding to address **infrastructure upgrades** as outlined in the 19 key recommendation areas recommended in the report to create conditions for a long term and sustainable Labuan Square community vision to flourish
3. Support Labuan Square community vision through **long term plan** involving design and implementation of community led activation and usage of the space through intentional and targeted community cultivation frameworks

Additional Recommendations

Suggested outline for achieving community vision beyond current funding priorities

1. An ongoing presence by a key body or stakeholder partnership who take responsibility for the co-design and ongoing development of Labuan square as a vibrant neighbourhood hub.
2. Facilitation of connection between key stakeholders (ie. residents, traders, shop owners, community groups).
3. An ongoing forum for community leaders and residents to shape and lead the development of initiatives, projects and events which enrich community life at Labuan square.
4. The facilitation of a co-design process for developing, refining and implementing key initiatives, projects and events within the community.
5. A method for monitoring and evaluating these ongoing processes.

Summary of 19 key recommendations

Recommendations in **Red** (1-3,10,12,16 & 17) are within scope of the current funding model for redevelopment of the public space

Recommendations in **Green** are outside of the scope of current funding but provide a direction for future investment

1. **Prioritise current funding towards landscaping design and works**
2. **Engage a landscape architect with expertise in sustainable urban landscaping who can deliver with a brief on natural materials, soft lines and color**
3. **Develop community activation plan that incorporates participation and usage of the spaces**
4. Investigate what options are available for the City of Greater Geelong to affect shop tenancy when buildings are privately owned.
5. Facilitate traders' group and provide support through councils economic development team
6. Repair and improve signage on site and directional signage on Princess Hwy and Station Street
7. Develop a promotional campaign to advertise the opportunities provided by the square
8. Raise local awareness of the difference between City owned public space and private ownership of buildings/shops
9. Long term community activation plan that incorporates economic revitalisation strategies
10. **Prioritise current funding towards public art and play experiences**
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12. **Conduct a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) assessment on the site**
13. Prioritise toilet upgrade and change of location
14. Work with shop owners and services to upgrade shopfronts
15. Long term community activation plan that incorporates participation to continue community capacity *to 'care for the square'*
16. **Landscape design to include space for performance or public events or activities**
17. **Community noticeboard for events and sharing information in a non-digital manner**
18. Raise awareness of events, activities, services, and organisations already operating within the vicinity of Labuan Square
19. Community activation plan that incorporates events and usage promotion strategies