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Outcomes of community consultation and submissions process

Proposed lease of Council land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston, for the purpose of Affordable Housing

September 2018

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1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the outcomes of consultation and submissions received regarding the proposed lease of Council land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston, for the purpose of an affordable housing development.

The report outlines the consultation undertaken, the submissions received, the common issues raised in submissions, and demographic analysis.

2. Project background

Darebin Council is committed to ensuring our city is an affordable and inclusive place to live, and to demonstrating strong leadership in facilitating and supporting increased Affordable Housing supply.

Council is actively exploring ways of working effectively with the State Government to increase the supply of Affordable Housing within the municipality. Council believes an inter-governmental approach is needed to address the housing challenges facing many residents of Darebin, Melbourne and Australia. As well as focusing on advocacy and partnership, Council is exploring how its own assets can be used for Affordable Housing. This has been established through numerous policies and decisions:

- Darebin Housing Stress: A Local Action Plan 2010-2013 identified the provision of land as a key action that Council can take in supporting affordable housing outcomes.
- Responding to Housing Stress: A Local Action Plan 2013-2017 identified possible options for increasing social and affordable housing across the municipality, including on Council-owned land.
- In 2015, Council sought to ‘test the market’ for a social and affordable housing program in Darebin. Positive responses were received from numerous organisations at this time.
- On 16 April 2016 it endorsed the Darebin Social and Affordable Housing Program on Council Owned Land – Pilot Project, which identified three potential sites for further investigation. One of these sites, 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston, is the site presented for consideration in this briefing paper.

The site being considered in this report is 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston. The site is well-located and within the Preston Central Structure Plan area. It is close to transport, jobs, services and community spaces. It is approximately 1,140 square metres and valued at approximately \$3.6 million (the air rights are valued at approximately \$1.8 million).

Council is committed to ensuring that the views of community members are considered in decision making. Prior to selling or leasing any Council-owned site, Council needs to comply with certain statutory obligations under the *Local Government Act 1989* (“the Act”), including publishing a public notice of Council’s intention to sell or lease the interest in the land; and taking into account any submissions received in respect of such notice.

3. Consultation activities

A communications and engagement plan was developed to guide the engagement process. The following provides an overview of key messages, activities, stakeholder groups, and timeframes. The communications and engagement emphasises the following:

- Council is committed to increasing the supply of Affordable Housing in Darebin, and to ensuring that our community is inclusive of a diverse range of people.
- Council is seeking the community's views on whether a parcel of its own land should be leased for the purpose of Affordable Housing.
- Council has not made a decision in relation to the land. Any Council decision would follow community consultation.

The table below (Table 1) provides an overview of key communications and engagement activities, stakeholder groups, content and timeframes.

Table 1: Consultation Activities

Activity	Stakeholders Targeted	Key Messages and Content	Date
Media release	Wider Community Media outlets Adjoining residents Local business owners Community housing sector Potential future residents	As per above, plus: Council is working with the LMCF to attempt to unlock solutions to the housing crisis. Council will be consulting on the proposal from late June to late July	13 th June
Letter	Adjoining residents – 500 meter radius Community housing sector Potential future residents Local business owners	As per above, plus: Council will hold a hearing to hear submitters in early August Instructions on how to make a submission Includes reply paid envelope and survey	Week of 25 th June
Notice in newspaper	Wider community Community housing sector Potential future residents	Statutory notice	Week of 25 th June
Yoursay Web site presence	Wider community Adjoining residents Local business owners Community housing sector Potential future residents	As per above, plus: Survey tool Submission tool Frequently Asked Questions Detailed information Tool to sign up for email updates	Week of 25 th June to week of 23 rd July
Letters and emails	Submitters	Responding to incorrect information being distributed, clarification of core elements of proposal, offering to meet submitters	Week of 13 th August
Hearing of submissions	Anyone who has made a submission and wishes to be heard	Hearing submitters	20 th August

The key messages and contact information were translated into the eight most spoken languages in Darebin.

Submissions were received in hard copy, electronic and email format. Where hard copy submissions were received, officers entered these into the online portal.

4. Submissions received

Three hundred and nine submissions were received, which represents a response rate of approximately nine per cent (a total of 3,584 letters were sent). The level of engagement in this matter has been high. There has been a large number of submissions, which reflects the significant community interest in Affordable Housing.

It is noted that a number of individuals made multiple submissions. Where this has occurred, officers have consolidated their comments into a single submission. One submitter made both a supportive and non-supportive submission. Both have been accepted.

39 per cent, or 121 submitters, supported Council's proposal, while 61 per cent (188 submitters) did not support Council's proposal (refer Figure 1).

Forty-seven submitters requested to speak in support of their submissions at the Hearing of Submissions on 20th August 2018. Fifteen submitters spoke at the Hearing. All submitters who requested to be heard were informed of the time and date of the Hearing of Submissions via email or letter, and a notice was also published in the Northcote and Preston Leader newspapers on the 7th and 8th of August.

A report summarising the submissions and the Hearing of Submissions Committee meeting was published on Council's web site¹.

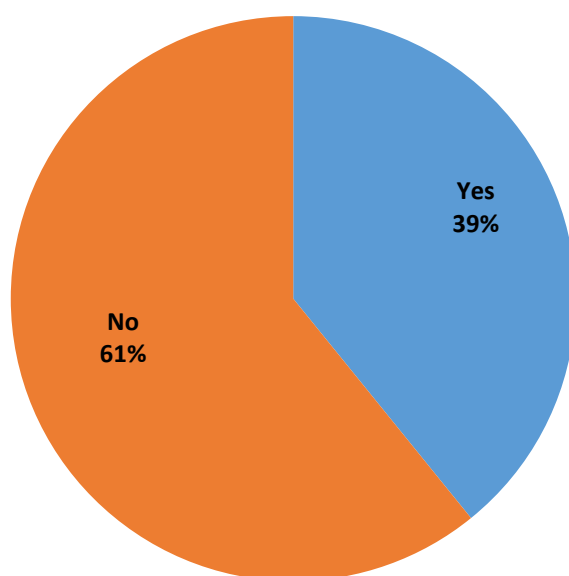


Figure 1: Responses to "Do you support Council's proposal to lease land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue, Preston for the purpose of affordable housing?"

¹ Available at <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/en/Your-Council/How-council-works/Meeting-Agendas-and-Minutes/Council-Meetings>

5. Dominant issues raised in submissions

Analysis of the content of submissions was undertaken, and common themes and issues were identified. **Appendix 1** provides further explanation of these themes.

Some submissions used language or raised issues identified have been considered defamatory or disrespectful. This includes submissions that labelled particular people or groups as ‘undesirable’ or ‘the wrong kind of people’. Labelling people and groups in this way is degrading and not respectful of their human dignity. Council has a duty to uphold the right of everyone to be protected from inhuman or degrading treatment, and actively opposes the labelling of such groups in this way. For the purpose of this report, where such issues have been raised, they have been classified as “concern over future tenants”.

The figure below (Figure 2) shows the dominant issues across all responses.

It is noted that the focus of the consultation process was whether Council should lease the land for the purpose of affordable housing. As evidenced below, issues beyond the scope of this question were raised in submissions.

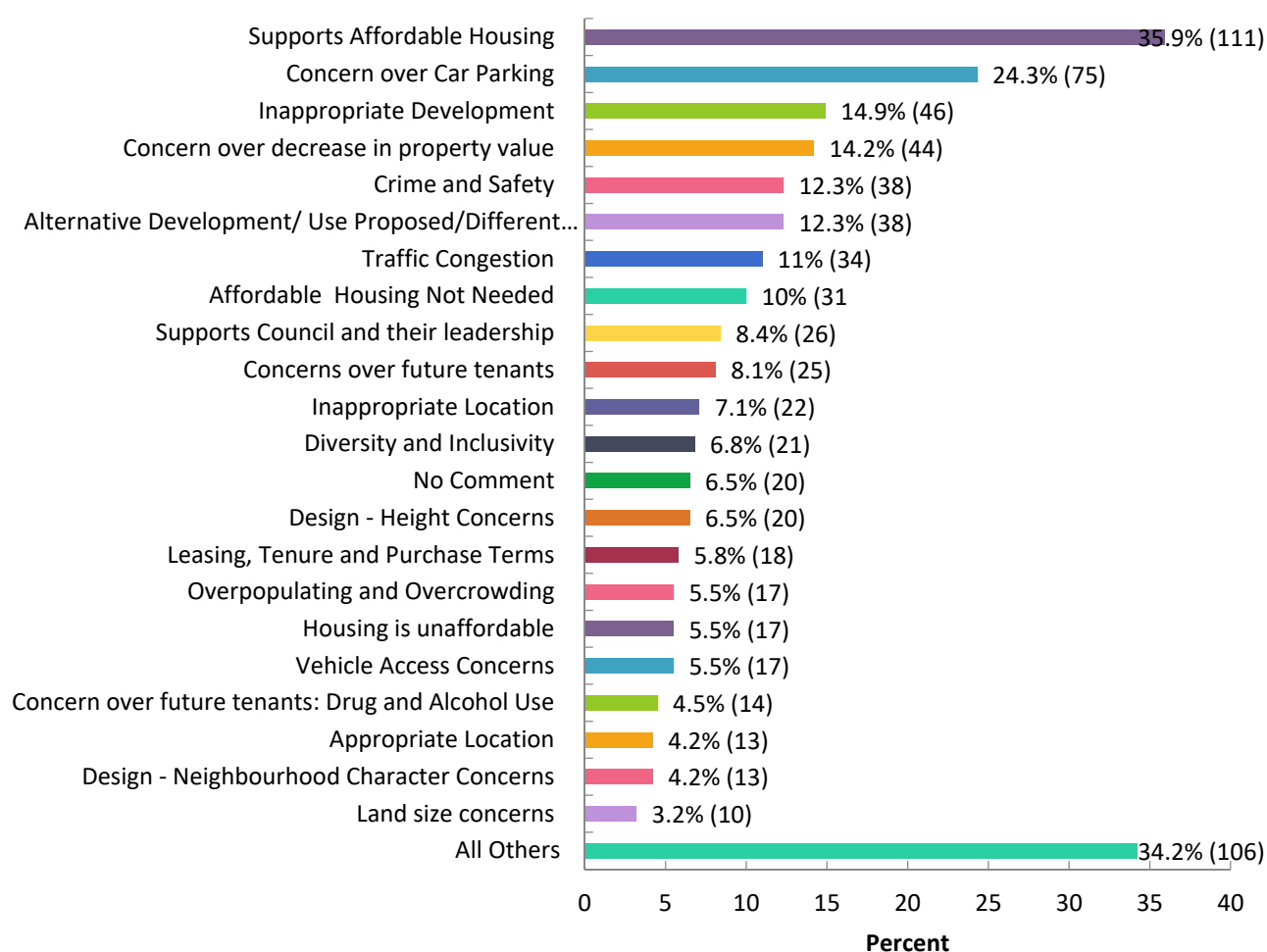


Figure 2: Dominant themes raised in all submissions

5.1. Dominant issues for yes respondents

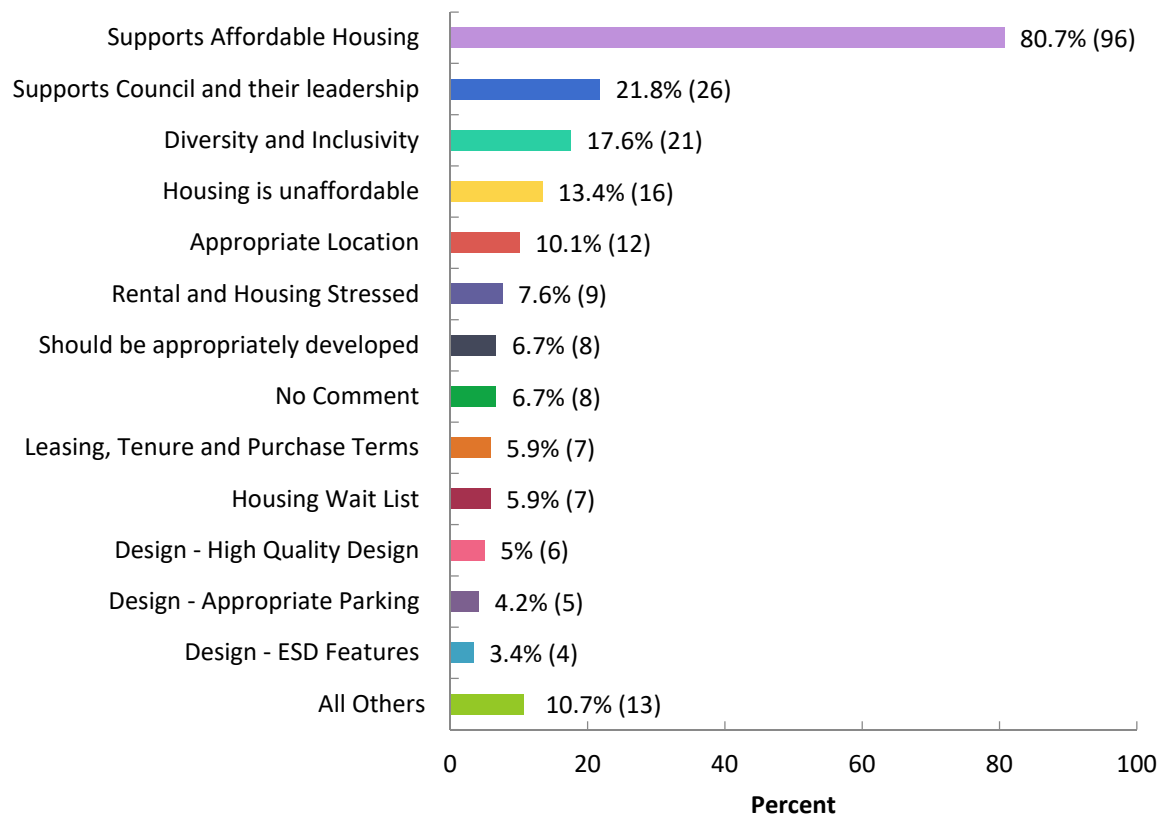


Figure 3: Dominant issues for yes respondents

As can be seen in Figure 3, the majority of Yes respondents supported an increase in affordable housing. Other common themes included support for a diverse and inclusive community, support for Council and their leadership, recognition of housing affordability issues and the need for everyone to be able to access housing.

A number of supportive submissions emphasised the need for high quality design and environmentally sustainable development.

5.2. Dominant issues for no respondents

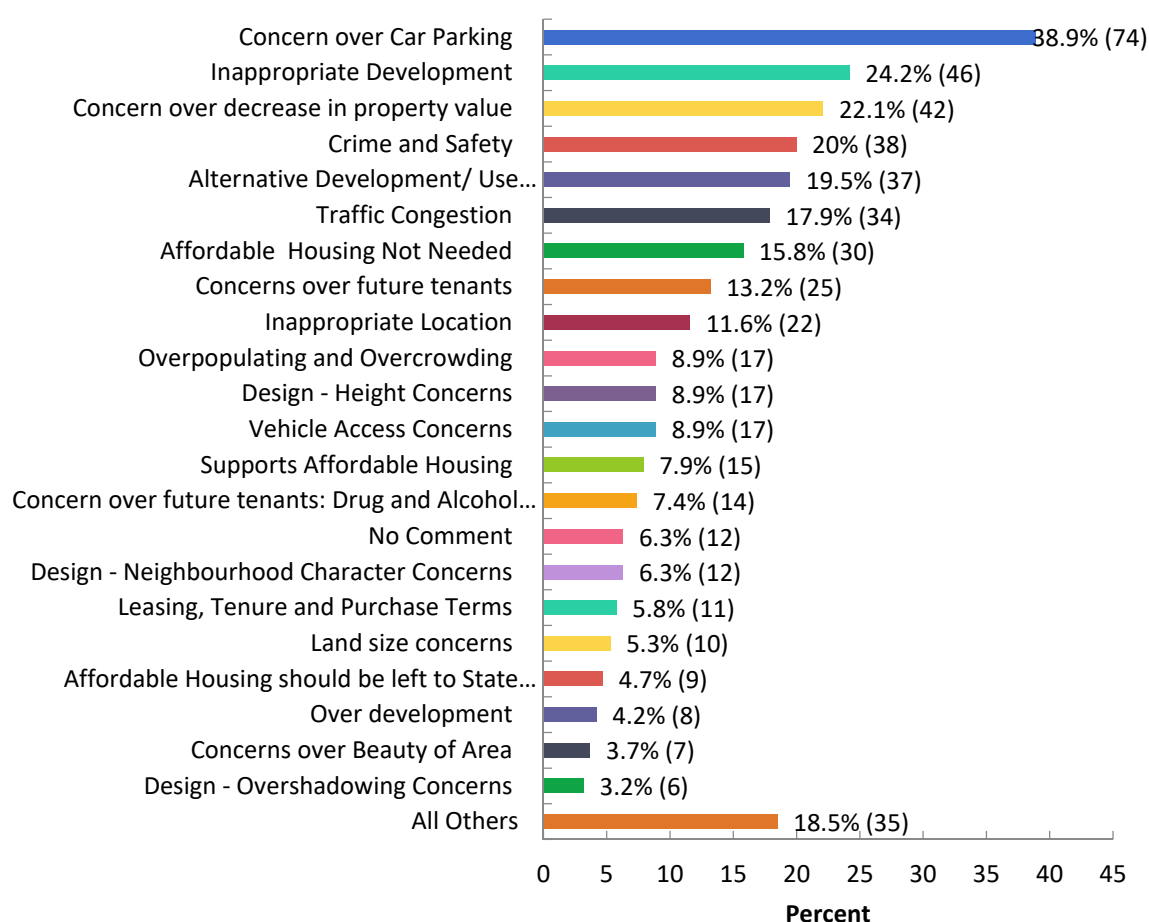


Figure 4: Dominant issues for no respondents

As can be seen in Figure 4 above, car parking was the most common issue raised in submissions that were not supportive of the proposal. Other dominant themes included 'inappropriate development'; this included concern that any proposed development would not be in keeping the scale, character or amenity of the neighbourhood. Concern over decreases in property value was also common, as was a perception that affordable housing would impact on crime and safety in the area. A number of submissions suggested alternative uses for the site (including parkland, continued use solely as car parking, community facilities or commercial uses), or an alternative location for the affordable housing development.

5.3. What Council could do to gain support

The submission form asked the question "Is there anything that Council could change that would gain your support?"

154 responses were received to this question. 86 (56 per cent) of these responses indicated "No". Figure 5 below shows the most common issues raised in the remaining 44 per cent of responses.

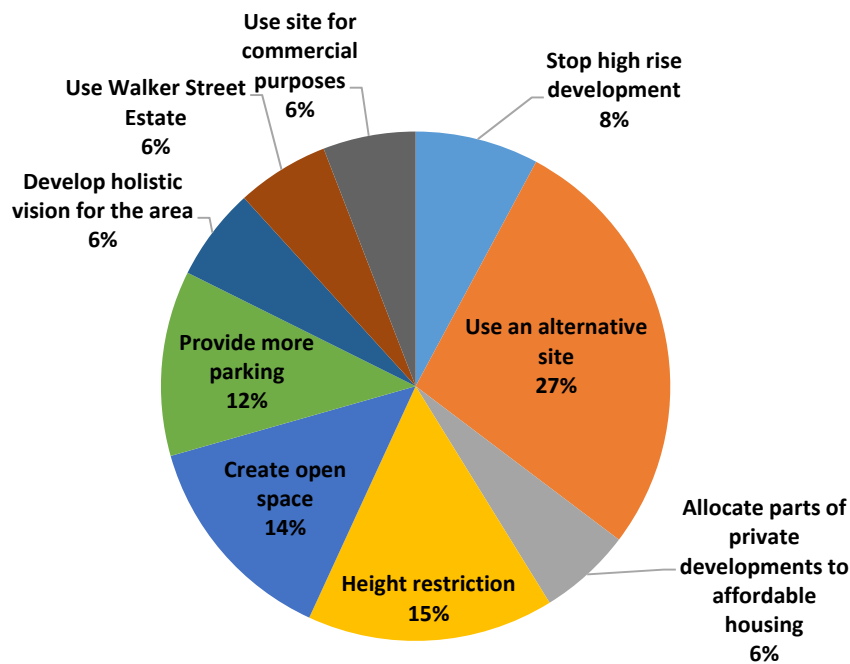


Figure 5: Common issues in response to "Is there anything that Council could do to gain your support?"

As illustrated above, the most common suggestion was for Council to use an alternative site. These responses included suggestion that areas away from activity centres, in industrial areas, in outer suburban areas, and areas other than Preston. Some specific sites were suggested.

The second most common suggestion was to restrict the height of any proposed development. Suggested heights ranged between one and four storeys.

6. Demographic information

Submitters had the option to provide information relating to their age and current housing tenure. It is noted that not all submitters provided this information, therefore the totals below do not equate to the total number of submissions received.

It is important to note that the findings of this consultation process cannot be considered a representative sample of the Darebin population. This is explored further below.

6.1. Age and tenure results

Figures 6 and 7 show the responses broken down by tenure and age. As can be seen in Figure 6, just over half of respondents owned their home outright, and 30 per cent were paying off a mortgage on their home.

Figure 6: Housing tenure of submitters

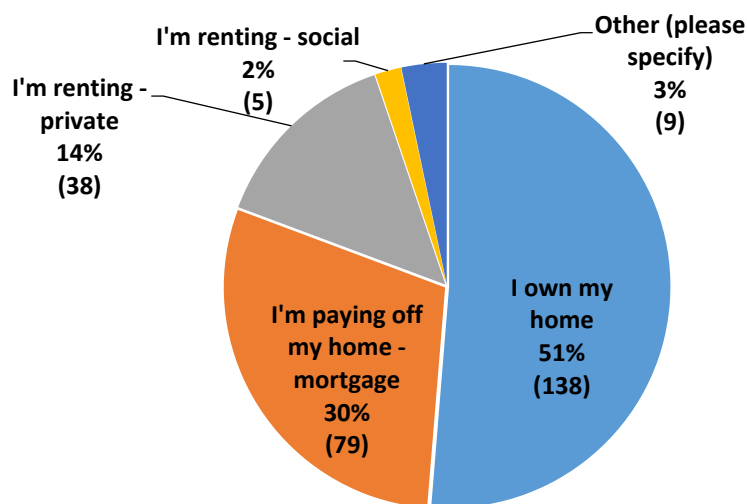
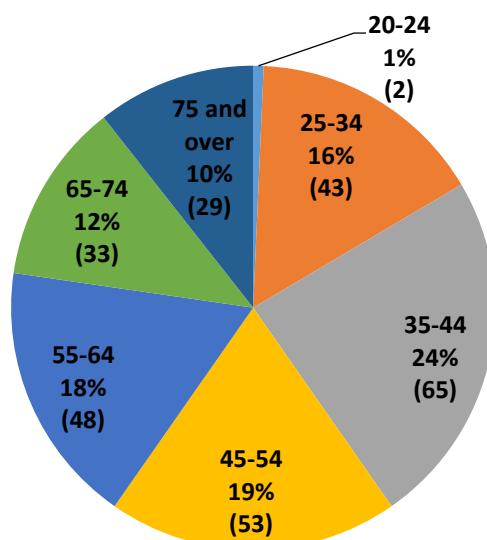


Figure 7: Age of submitters



6.2. Yes and no respondents by age and tenure

The following tables show the breakdown of yes and no respondents by age and tenure.

Do you support Council's proposal to lease land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue for the purpose of Affordable Housing?			
	Yes	No	Row Total
Which of the following best describes the current situation of your household?			
I own my home Frequency Row %	36 26.1%	102 73.9%	138 51.3%
I'm paying off my ... Frequency Row %	35 44.3%	44 55.7%	79 29.4%
I'm renting - priv... Frequency Row %	32 84.2%	6 15.8%	38 14.1%
I'm renting - social Frequency Row %	5 100.0%	0 0.0%	5 1.9%
Other (please spe... Frequency Row %	3 33.3%	6 66.7%	9 3.3%
Column Total	111	158	269 100%

Table 1: Yes and no respondents by tenure

As can be seen in Table 1, 100 per cent of social housing tenants and 84 per cent of private housing tenants supported Council's proposal, while 74 per cent of those who owned their home outright and 55 per cent of those with a mortgage did not.

Do you support Council's proposal to lease land at 52-60 Townhall Avenue for the purpose of Affordable Housing?			
	Yes	No	Row Total
The following questions will help us to understand more about you and are optional. The demographic information you provide on this form will not be linked to your personal details as it will be aggregated and used for analysis purposes only.			
What is your age group?			
16-19 Frequency Row %	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
20-24 Frequency Row %	2 100.0%	0 0.0%	2 0.7%
25-34 Frequency Row %	24 55.8%	19 44.2%	43 15.8%
35-44 Frequency Row %	28 43.1%	37 56.9%	65 23.8%
45-54 Frequency Row %	16 30.2%	37 69.8%	53 19.4%
55-64 Frequency Row %	25 52.1%	23 47.9%	48 17.6%
65-74 Frequency Row %	12 36.4%	21 63.6%	33 12.1%
75 and over Frequency Row %	5 17.2%	24 82.8%	29 10.6%
Column Total	112	161	273 100%

Table 2: Yes and no respondents by age

As can be seen in Table 2, responses varied by age cohort. The majority of those under 34, as well as those aged between 55 and 64, supported Council's proposal. The majority of those aged between 35 and 55, as well as those aged 65 and above did not support Council's proposal.

6.3. Analysis of demographic information

The demographic data collected provides an opportunity for analysis and contextualisation of the submissions received. It was not the intention of the consultation process to produce a representative sample of the Darebin population, and the consultation approach targeted owners and occupiers within a 500 metre radius of the subject site. Nevertheless, it is useful to compare the demographic profile of submitters with the broader Darebin population, to contextualise the responses and understand which groups are being over- or under-represented.

6.3.1. Tenure

The results relating to tenure show that those in social and private rental are overwhelmingly supportive of the proposal (at 100 per cent and 84 per cent respectively). This could be related to these cohorts being those that are most likely to benefit from more affordable housing being provided. Notwithstanding this, those in social and private rental are under-represented in the submissions responses, when compared with the greater Darebin population. As shown in Table 3 below, private renters account for 31.5 per cent of the Darebin population, but only 14.1 per cent of submission respondents. Similarly, social housing tenants make up 4.3 per cent of the Darebin population, but only 1.9 per cent of respondents.

While attempts were made to reach groups that could reasonably represent the views of potential future residents, the response results indicate that this was not achieved. This reflects similar outcomes in other affordable housing projects in Melbourne².

Tenure type	Submission Respondents (%)	Darebin population (%)	Difference (%)
Own their home	51.3	28.7	+22.6
Paying off their home	29.4	26	+3.4
Private rental	14.1	31.5	-17.4
Social rental	1.9	4.3	-2.4
Other	3.3	9.1	-5.8

Table 3: Housing tenure of submitters compared to Darebin population

The majority of those who either owned or were paying off their home did not support the proposal (at 74 per cent and 56 per cent respectively). In contrast to those who are renting, existing home owners are less likely to benefit from the additional supply of affordable housing. In contrast to renters, home owners are over-represented in the submission responses. While only 28.7 per cent of the Darebin population own their home outright, this group accounts for 51.3 per cent of submitters. Those who are paying off their home are

² Press, M 2009, Community Engagement and Community Housing: Lessons and practical strategies for Local Government for responding to contested community housing proposals, prepared for City of Port Phillip, available at [http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Final_report_version_4_Sep09_\(3\).pdf](http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Final_report_version_4_Sep09_(3).pdf)

slightly over-represented in the responses received, at 29.4 per cent, compared to 26 per cent across Darebin.

6.3.2. Age

As with tenure, when comparing the age of submitters to the Darebin population, certain groups are over- and under-represented. As can be seen in Table 4, those aged below 34 are under-represented, while those aged above 35 are over-represented.

Age is particularly important in relation to tenure and affordable housing discussions. This is because young people are disproportionately impacted by the lack of affordable housing, and rates of home ownership among people under 39 have been steadily declining since 2001³. Recent research indicates that home ownership is increasingly influenced by the wealth of an individual's parents⁴. Rates of home ownership are declining among all Australians under the age of 65⁵.

Age	Submission Respondents (%)	Darebin population (%)	Difference (%)
20-24	0.7	7.7	-7
25-34	15.8	19.4	-3.6
35-44	23.8	15.6	+8.2
45-54	19.4	13.1	+6.3
55-64	17.6	9.3	+8.3
65-74	12.1	6.4	+5.7
75+	10.6	7.8	+2.8

Table 4: Age of submitters compared to Darebin population

Research from both Australia and overseas indicates that the typical demographic profile of objectors to affordable housing developments is older people that are home owners, wealthier, better educated and more likely to advocate for their interests⁶. It is important that the views of all people, even those that are not represented in community engagement processes, are considered in decision making.

7. Conclusion

This report has summarised the consultation process, submissions received, dominant themes in submissions and attitudes toward Affordable Housing. Council responses to the main issues identified will be in the Council report. The consultation process generated significant community interest and a high volume of submissions.

Broadly, the issues raised through the consultation process are similar to those raised in other developments in Darebin, and other Affordable Housing developments in Melbourne. Common themes among those supportive of the proposal included a recognition of the need for Affordable Housing, support for Council's leadership and recognition of the importance of

³ Wilkins, R 2017, The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 15, the 12th Annual Statistical Report of the HILDA Survey, Melbourne Institute: Applied Economics and Social Research, University of Melbourne, available at

https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2437426/HILDA-SR-med-res.pdf

⁴ Daley, J., Coates, B., and Wiltshire, T. (2018). Housing affordability: re-imagining the Australian dream. Grattan Institute, available at <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/901-Housing-affordability.pdf>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Press, M 2009, Community Engagement and Community Housing: Lessons and practical strategies for Local Government for responding to contested community housing proposals, prepared for City of Port Phillip, available at [http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Final_report_version_4_Sep09_\(3\).pdf](http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/Final_report_version_4_Sep09_(3).pdf)

diversity and inclusion. Common themes among those that were not supportive of the proposal included concern over car parking, the scale and form of a future development, the perceived impact on property values, and perceived impact on crime and safety.

Certain groups were over- and under-represented in the submissions received. People aged under 35 were under-represented, while those aged over 35 were over-represented. Renters of private and social housing were under-represented, while home owners were over-represented.

8. Appendix 1: Explanation of themes

Issue	Explanation	Example from submissions
Supports affordable housing	Supports the concept of and need for affordable housing. Acknowledges that there is a need for this type of housing in Darebin.	"We need more affordable housing in this area." "Any increase in affordable housing is greatly needed to assist those in need"
Concern over car parking	Concern over the loss of car parking, the increased parking demand resulting from the development and where existing car parking is inadequate.	"No parking means no business, no customers. On the peak hour, very often, my driveway is blocked by car parking"
Inappropriate Development	Concern that the scale, height, form or impact of any development would not be appropriate for the area.	"Inappropriate development for the area, and does not integrate with current landscape"
Concern over decrease in property value	Concern that the proposal will cause the property values to decrease	"My interest is to improve/increase the value of land in Darebin. This is not achieved by the development of so called affordable housing."
Crime and safety	The perception that an affordable housing development will result in increased rates of crime and decreased sense of safety.	"increase in crime and violent behaviour, and decrease in community cohesion." "crime is already an issue in the area and I fear this kind of housing will only lead to more."
Alternative Development/ Use Proposed/ Different Location	Proposes an alternative use such as multilevel car parking, open and green space, community hub space, more council space, child and disability centre or adopt the nightingale concept. Others have suggested a different location for affordable housing.	"Council should build and I.T hub linked to the library. Hub will include I.T hardware for all local residents to enjoy." "More parks, more green spaces, more playgrounds for Preston. And act now before there's absolutely zero space left to reclaim"
Traffic Congestion	Concern that the development will increase traffic congestion, that the area is already congested. Concern that congestion could impact productivity of Preston Central and reduce access.	"We have enough traffic its chaos in area as it is" "The Preston area over the years especially the past year or so has become so congested with cars and people everywhere making even a simple trip to nearby stores an ordeal."

Affordable Housing not Needed	There is enough/too much affordable housing in the area already. Or that the current use on the land outweighs the benefits of an affordable housing development therefore are generally unsupportive of the development.	"we have enough affordable housing. There is too many high-rise/apartments at Preston now." "The area does not need affordable housing as it does not fit in with the good standing of neighbourhood or/and the price of the properties in the area."
Supports Council and their leadership	Supports council's stance on affordable housing and applauds council's leadership in leading the way for other councils.	"The Darebin Council should be commended for this project." "More Councils taking a lead to utilise their land for affordable housing is very welcome and is expected to show what is possible for other councils and communities."
Inappropriate Location	That the proposed development is in a location that will have a negative impact on Preston Central's primary amenities such as High Street, Preston Station, Preston Market and the impact the suburban feeling of Preston, or that the location is not a suitable one for Affordable Housing.	"The location is inappropriate as it cannot support the increase in numbers as things are already strained." "Preston is not a suburb suitable for affordable housing. Not enough parking in the area as it is. Preston is a family based suburb and a very safe place to live."
Diversity and Inclusivity	The area should be affordable and inclusive to everyone regardless of their background and socio-economic status. Places value on diversity and inclusion in communities.	"Inclusiveness keeps communities vibrant and strong." "We want people of all incomes and backgrounds to be able to afford to live in our municipality."
Design - Height Concerns	Concern regarding potential height of a development and the perceived impact of this on the amenity of the area.	"I do agree with Council supporting affordable housing for Darebin. But I do not support a five storey development in a quiet back street, it would be different if it was on a main road. I would think that no more than 3 storeys is better suited to that area" "We do not support a possible 5 storey site being built in a small and tight area."

Concerns over future tenants	<p>Concern regarding the behaviour of future tenants, or holding particular beliefs regarding the attributes of these tenants.</p> <p>Council notes that some of the language used in these submissions is not respectful of the human dignity of people and groups. Council upholds its duty to protect individuals and groups from inhuman and degrading treatment.</p>	<p>"residents in affordable housing are known to cause trouble. This scares me as I live alone"</p> <p>"Unfortunately, low-cost affordable housing may attract the wrong kind of people for Preston."</p>
Leasing, tenure and purchase terms	<p>Residents question the level of negotiation, monitoring and management over the lease and tenure of the development and whether or not the development can meet the objective of affordable housing with many hoping that Council can provide a positive outcome through their terms.</p>	<p>"Council has a strong role in negotiating and monitoring property and tenant management."</p> <p>"A lease is preferable to sale because it will maintain an asset and ensure that the use meets an objective"</p>
Overpopulation and overcrowding	<p>Development will overpopulate and overcrowd the area that will introduce issues surrounding parking, traffic congestion and undesirable people.</p>	<p>"Firstly- overcrowding of flats in Preston - you are allowing the area to be overflowed with flats. We do not want our beautiful suburbs to be overcrowded with drug addicts, drug dealers, ex prisoners"</p> <p>"Preston is already crowded, needs more parking space. "</p>
Housing is unaffordable	<p>Recognition that housing is unaffordable in Preston Central, with many supporting the development, many realise the rapid gentrification and increase of housing prices in the area make Preston a inaccessible area.</p>	<p>"Increasing house and cost of living expenses result in debt stress on individuals and families, leading to negative situations for those affected. No-one is immune to the potential of such situations."</p> <p>"I think the cost of living and house affordability is ridiculous."</p>
Vehicle Access Concerns	<p>Concern regarding the impact on accessing driveways through the right of way with the development blocking one accessway, increased difficulty finding off-street parking for residents leaving on the street and driveways blocked by parking.</p>	<p>"Cars are always parking in front of my house, blocking my driveway "</p> <p>"The parking at Townhall Avenue is already a nightmare as majority of the households do not have driveways and rely on off-street parking."</p>

More Open and Green Space	There is a need for open space in the area. Suggests that the site should be an open space.	<p>"There is No park at all near us for them to play in. If you want to get rid of the carpark how about do something we residents actually want, like a park!"</p> <p>"Integral green space and recreation for residents should be included."</p>
Concern over future tenants: drug and alcohol use	Perception that future tenants will be substance abusers and impact the safety of the neighbourhood.	<p>"Will entice drug addicts, drug dealers"</p> <p>"I do not want any sort of people who are not trust worthy, suitable, non reasonable, aggressive alcoholics, druggies living my area and we need more carpark."</p>
Appropriate location	Location of the development is appropriate due to its proximity to amenities and services such as public transport, and Preston Central.	<p>"It's a great location for it. Close to all facilities"</p> <p>"The planned site is a good location close to shops, public transport and other services."</p>
Design - Neighbourhood Character concerns	Proposed development is not in keeping with the character of the neighbourhood.	<p>"The character of homes in the City of Darebin is slowly eroding"</p> <p>"An apartment lot will ruin the street landscape and doesn't fit within the existing character of the area"</p>
Land Size Concerns	Perception that the size of the land is not sufficient for a development of five storeys, or where more land should be dedicated to Affordable Housing.	<p>"It would appear to me that the block of land is too small for the size of the development"</p> <p>"Why are we using a carpark, the smallest parcel of land."</p>