

Mount Hawthorn Placecheck

Saturday 16 October 2004

What is 'Community Visioning'?

The Town of Vincent is carrying out a Community Visioning Project known as Vincent Vision 2024. Vincent Vision 2024 is designed to help residents, ratepayers, business owners and visitors of the Town share their vision of how they want to see their neighbourhood, business area, street and town centre over the years to 2024. The result will be a shared community vision which will set the direction for the Town of Vincent Town Planning Scheme and guide Council decision-making into the future. As part of the process, 5 Town Centre Placecheck Analysis and workshops have been carried out in the Town.

What is a Placecheck?

A Placecheck is a system originating from the Urban Design Alliance, a UK based organisation, which helps groups of people and organisations find a way forward to improve their neighbourhood in a systematic way. The placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focusing people on working together to achieve them. Five Placecheck Analyses have been carried out in the Town from September through to December 2004. Based on a system of questions and answers, Placecheck is a simple and powerful tool to identify the positive and negative qualities of a place, and can be easily used by both professionals and local residents. It also provides thorough guidance on how to involve local people, politicians and professionals.

Mount Hawthorn

The Mount Hawthorn town centre is traversed by Scarborough Beach Road and is characterised by strip shopping along Scarborough Beach Road predominately between Oxford Street and Matlock Street. The first business appeared in 1907 between Flinders (then Hicks) and Coogee (Wittenoom) Streets. The shopping area consists of buildings constructed from this time and includes the significant Paddington Alehouse dating from 1931.

After World War 2 (1939-45), a number of war service homes were built around Mt Hawthorn. Many of these weatherboard and/or fibro homes, often mounted on jarrah stumps, are still dotted around the suburb.

Also during the postwar period, the increase in migration to Australia from European countries saw a significant Italian community settle in and around Mt Hawthorn. While many Italian families have moved on there is still a strong Italian presence, giving the shops and some homes a noticeable Mediterranean touch and contributing to Mt Hawthorn's cosmopolitan character.

Although no longer owned by Australia Post, the Post Office building in Scarborough Beach Rd was built in 1955. Mt Hawthorn Community Centre was opened in 1961 and 'The Plaza', Mt Hawthorn's shopping centre was opened in 1981. In 1986 the Mt Hawthorn Hotel became the Paddington Ale House ('The 'Paddo') which is an important element of the suburb's nightlife.

Stage 2 of the Mitchell Freeway was completed in 1976, cutting the adjacent suburb of Leederville in half and also effectively blocking Mt Hawthorn from convenient access to Lake Monger. In 1993 the Joondalup light railway was opened. Although no station was built at Mt Hawthorn, the suburb was re-connected with Lake Monger by way of a bridge across the freeway.

Since the 1990s, the proximity of Mt Hawthorn to the city, the beach, the cappuccino and restaurant strip of Leederville and the freeway/railway have made it a sought-after residential location.

The Placecheck

A Placecheck Analysis of the Mount Hawthorn area was carried out on Saturday 16th October 2004 by 18 residents. Participants of the Placecheck were divided into 4 groups and were provided with a map and a series of questions relating to the *Built Environment, Safety and Security, Pedestrians, A place with living streets and Identity*.

3 Basic Questions of a Placecheck

What do you like about this place?

The participants noted those aspects they liked about Mount Hawthorn as an area with evergreen trees, plants, trees, seats and with the mixed uses, single lanes of traffic and awnings giving it a village feeling.

What do you dislike about it?

In terms of dislikes, the groups noted that some awnings were "poxy" and that there were not enough plants, trees, shrubs and seats. In addition, there were too many vast areas of brick paving, the rubbish bins are too large and lamp posts and bus shelters are located in the middle of pavements.

What needs to be improved?

In asking what needs to be improved, the groups suggested planning that includes a vision for the area focusing on sustainability, pedestrians, third places, community seating, the environment, scale, landscaping and finances allocated to the area.

The participants were required to answer the following list of questions which specifically address the town centre. The checklist aims to help people understand each other's points of view, and serve as a useful starting point for discussing the issues and finding common ground.

1. Connecting Places

How can the physical form of buildings and spaces help to make the place work better?

Maintain the character frontage to the street. Add no more than 2 storeys and no impact to the character of the frontage.

1.a - A place with its own identity

Natural features - *Which green areas and open spaces are important to conserve and emphasise?*

All four groups unanimously noted the importance and popularity of Braithwaite and Menzies Parks and smaller parks within the area such as the Auckland/Hobart Street Reserve and Axford Park.

The groups also suggested having parks at each end of the town centre, that any natural areas should be retained to cope with future density and generally that there should be an increase in public open space provision in developments, particularly in front of buildings.

Large-scale planting - *Where would large-scale planting usefully provide shelter from the wind or shade from the sun?*

In response, the groups identified the following:- near the Paddington Alehouse, along Scarborough Beach Road, concrete corners, central street tree planting, roof top gardens and carparks.

Valued buildings - *Which existing buildings and structures are important to conserve?*

Those buildings which were considered important to conserve were the old Mount Hawthorn Post Office, the shop facades (between Fairfield and Coogee Streets), the Paddington Alehouse, the toilet building at Axford Park*and the warehouse next to the Mount Hawthorn Plaza.

**The Axford Park toilet block was built by the City of Perth. A few years ago the Town's officers recommended the building be demolished and replaced with a new self cleaning toilet on the site nearer the shopping strip. It was also recommended that the war memorial be located in place of the toilet building however this was not supported by the Council at the time.*

Local style - *Are there local building forms, practices and materials that should inspire what is built today?*

The groups noted that traditional shopfronts built to the footpath with verandahs should be continued with new developments being reflective/harmonious of this. It was also noted that large expansive development should be removed and facades should be broken up. There was also a preference for rendered finishes as opposed to face brick and tilt-up panels should be avoided.

There was also support for development setback with planting such as the new post office building on Scarborough Beach Road.

Scale - *Does the area have a general scale of building that should be followed for most new development?*

The groups unanimously supported a maximum of 3 storeys in the Town Centre. Notes that scale was incongruous and that sunlight/solar access be preserved were also made. Specifically, the chemist on the corner of Matlock Street is a good scale and contemporary as is the Challenge Bank but it needs softening with planting.

Skylines - *Are there distinct skylines (or opportunities to create them) that development should respect?*

The views towards the city for development should be preserved along with the mix of development. The southern side of the town centre should be kept single level. Height should be specified and between Flinders and Coogee Streets, the continuum of height.

Participants noted that there was enough room to go backwards.

Public art - *Are there places where works of art (such as sculpture, paving, water features and lighting) could enhance the place's character and sense of identity?*

Suggestions for public art such as the placement of tiles and sculptures were Braithwaite Park, Axford Park and the central shopping area between Fairfield and Coogee Streets. Other suggestions related to gardens with fountains at each end of the shopping strip, sculptures of local identities, a wall of fresh food on Coogee Street, gardens as public

art and the decoration of the blank walls of the Mount Hawthorn community centre with public art.

1.b - A place with living streets

Gap sites - *Are there places where a gap in an otherwise continuous line of building frontages along a street detracts from the street's quality? If so, how might the gap be filled? Alternatively, how might a usable, attractive space for pedestrians be created there?*

The groups identified a number of gap sites as follows:

the car park near the post office, the old petrol station on the corner of Oxford Street and Scarborough Beach Road, the Whelan's building, the right of way by Peter Treens which is also a traffic and pedestrian hazard and the gap by the old post office landing to a right of way.

Facing the street - *Are there places where the street would be livelier and feel safer if a building had windows or doors on to the street, rather than presenting a blank facade?*

The groups generally shared the same view in this instance citing the Woolworths/Mount Hawthorn Plaza shopping Centre, the side of Tredways facing Flinders Street and an overwhelming view that roller shutters are not appropriate. Other examples were the shop next to Front Division deli, the Mount Hawthorn community centre and the Commonwealth bank facade facing Scarborough Beach Road. Comments were also made that the street looks old and tired.

1.c - A public place

Taming the traffic - *Are there streets and street junctions that could be made to feel more like public spaces (by traffic calming, for example), rather than just traffic routes?*

Group 1 noted that the barriers which have been installed on Flinders Street obstructs pedestrians whereas other groups noted the turning stretch between Boulevard and Fairfield Streets at 50 km/h, a desire for more trees in the middle of the road, low plantings in corner areas and pedestrian activity in the street to be increased hence a 40 kmh speed limit.

All groups agreed that the whole of Scarborough Beach Road should be looked at in terms of traffic speed and insitu traffic management.

Living over shops - *Is there potential for living over shops to provide inhabited rooms overlooking streets and to encourage evening activity?*

All groups agreed it was a good idea which provided security and passive surveillance to the area although matters such as noise, the location of sleeping areas and the built form should be closely considered.

It was also seen as positive that balconies could act as awnings over the street.

Third Places - *Third places are generally those public places, apart from work and home, where people can come together. Are there any opportunities to create a third place within Mount Hawthorn?*

The groups noted that most shops provide for local community, serving as a function not a destination. Likely 3rd places were the community centre, shopping centres as meeting places, opportunities in car parks, a new attraction behind the shops, the old post office and Axford and Braithwaite Parks. The creation of 3rd places involves the community working with business owners including the shopping centre owner to create festivals/markets and such like. A youth facility, an arts/library centre and recreation/entertainment facilities being open in the evening were all cited in this section.

Safety and security - *What can be done to make the place safer and its properties more secure?*

To this question, rollers shutters were noted by Group 1 as not pleasant but necessary, that making active pedestrian routes at night time, bring lighting down to scale hence the creation of a new pedestrian environment. Crime prevention through environmental design, shade trees and the lighting of car parks.

Groups 2-4 noted more people, more appropriate mixed-use developments, more community interaction with street life and more bicycles racks. Lighting is important as is, graffiti control, socialisation and the opening hours of cafes/restaurants. Balconies facing Scarborough Beach Road, more businesses opening at night such as book shops and there is more parking than Leederville- creates business opportunities.

Car parks - *Are there places where a car park provides the immediate frontage to a street, and where the street would be improved in appearance and for pedestrians by a more active use?*

In this respect, the groups cited the TOV carparks between Coogee and Flinders Streets and Matlock Street. There were also suggestions to discourage on-street parking, slow traffic and time parking. It was also noted that the taxi rank outside the hotel was ineffective.

Open space - *Is there any public or open space that is not used for anything? How can it be made usable?*

Groups 1-3 noted Axford Park, the private spaces outside the old and new post offices and that more bins and seating should be provided in Braithwaite Park.

Shelter - *What places inadequately provide weather protection for pedestrians and what can be done about it?*

The provision of awnings all the way along Scarborough Beach Road.

Street life - *Do public spaces need to be adapted to accommodate local economic, social and cultural life as tourism, night life, eating, entertainment, sport, sitting-out, promenading, religious practices and retailing?*

Response were fairly varied and are listed as follows: sunlight should be preserved from taller building affects, traffic needs to be slowed, active alfresco dining, opening spaces, more street entertainment and support from private property owners.

1.c - A welcoming place

Landmarks - *Are new landmarks (buildings, works of art or other features) needed to create or improve views, and help people find their way around?*

To this question respondents gave names and suggestions:

Axford Park being activated and changed from public toilets, the introduction of heritage walk/ trails or as a memorial/landmark, turning Axford Park into Anzac/Turkish heritage trail with appropriate landscaping/ trees choice.

There is consensus amongst the groups that a sense of identity is needed, perhaps an art or entry statement, feature gardens or a fountain between The Boulevard and Scarborough Beach Road, Oxford Street and Scarborough Beach Road. It was also suggested that the Telstra Building be removed and that trees be planted on the corner of Dover Street to compliment Braithwaite Park.

Views - *Are there places where views need to be opened up?*

The groups suggested that the southern side of the shopping strip needs to be kept low in scale to maintain the city views. Other suggestions related to residential above the shops and a new shopping centre.

Corner buildings - *Are there places where a new corner building could provide a useful landmark?*

Respondents noted the opening up of the Mount Hawthorn shopping centre to the street would be useful and identified landmark corners as the old petrol station and the Telstra building on the corners of Scarborough Beach Road and Oxford Street, the Paddington Alehouse, the corner of Fairfield Street and Scarborough Beach Road and the corner of The Boulevard and Scarborough Beach Road.

In addition, one group noted that the corner of Dover Street and Scarborough Beach R needs to be made more attractive and visible, identifying characters and a possible entry statement. Such a corner would not necessarily have to have a building, but if so, preferably a small two storey building with gardens.

Gateways - *What can be done to mark places that act as gateways to particular areas?*

The groups made the following suggestions with regard to marking places as landmarks:

To use the footbridge as an icon, replace the disused service station with native vegetation, City of South Perth examples, creative urban design with attractive fountains, seats, Art Grants, use of welcoming signs, more gardens and improvement of the access way from the freeway.

Civic buildings - *Are there public spaces that would be visible and accessible locations for public and community buildings?*

The groups noted that these already exist however they need to be activated with public art, obvious entrances and vegetation. The Community Centre was noted as an example however not sure if best? The old post office was suggested but public open space was to be protected in the Mount Hawthorn area.

Lighting - *Are there places that need better lighting to help people find their way around, to highlight landmarks, to show off attractive buildings, or to disguise eyesores?*

Yes- everywhere! Examples include lighting up trees and planting eucalyptus for street trees, off foot paths, the path in the middle of the road, the Paddington Alehouse should be well lit, Challenge Bank and bus shelters. The lighting and stands should be attractive.

Signage - *Are there places where more or better signs are needed?*

Car park signage can be improved but not obvious, more attractive signage, maybe public art, and indication of entrance at both ends. Remove the Peter Treen sign? Signs to be in scale.

1.d - An adaptable place

Events - *Are there public spaces that should be made more easily adaptable for markets, festivals and other events?*

Axford Park was noted as a possible location for a swap meet and Braithwaite/Mount Hawthorn Community Centre for a festival. Other groups made suggestions relating to a plant nursery, educational opportunities, an outdoor cinema and productions by local schools.

Reserved sites - *Are there sites that should be reserved for facilities (such as shops, leisure, community or workspace) that it might be possible to provide at a later date?*

Disused caryards were suggested however the area is not really lacking community facilities. The Mount Hawthorn Community Centre to stay in its current use. A market festival on a large site to make it viable and the corner of Oxford Street and Scarborough Beach Road to be more lively with restaurants and cafes. Shops should also be continued through to Oxford Street. The old post office would also be a suitable site for such a use.

1.f - A place that makes good use of its resources

Land - *Are there buildings, sites or areas that are underused? What would help bring them into use and what might they be used for?*

The public toilets at Axford Park. Vacant sites along Matlock and Oxford Streets - needs development to occur. Again the disused service station site, and the old post office is suggested as a good site for a community centre.

2. Connecting Movement

2.a - Public transport

Density - *What can be done to ensure that the density of development is highest where access to public transport is best?*

The encouragement of commercial/ residential mixed uses and increasing the frequency of bus services on the weekend. Careful planning and design carried out properly. Increase density at shopping centre perhaps with a bus interchange. It was noted that this was a "Very bad leading Question."

2.b - Pedestrians

Connected spaces - *Are there public spaces that need to become part of a route that is well used by people on foot?*

Some intersections are not pedestrian friendly there are no safe fences/bars. Scarborough Beach Road - Mount Hawthorn-nicely paved but need more seats for elderly in shade.

Pavements - *Are there pedestrian routes that need to be made more even and non-slip, clearer to recognise, better lit and less cluttered by street furniture?*

Paddington Street should be better lit, increased native landscaping in lieu of pavement. Rubbish bins to be smaller. No lamps-posts/ bus-shops in middle of pavements. Need to be more even. Respondents also noted that pedestrian routes should not be cluttered with street furniture, fenced for safety and defined from roads.

The north side of Scarborough Beach Road from Flinders Street to Coogee Street is very uneven and bad for seniors, prams, trolleys.

Cycling - *What needs to be done to encourage cycling, and to make cycling safer for cyclists and pedestrians?*

Whilst one group said it was fairly unsafe and would be hard to improve for cycling, other groups suggested more cycle racks and signage, a reduction in speed along roads and that no bike paths are provided which should be parallel to the road or behind.

Junctions - *Are there junctions that should be made to look more obviously like the way into an area, helping to give the area identity and making it easier for people to find their way around?*

Flinders, Oxford Street, Scarborough Beach Road, investigate traffic movements and improve with signage and trees to be more welcoming and distinctive: ie: coming into a new area.

Barriers - *What barriers to movement would be better removed?*

Remove railings at Flinders cross-section; rubbish bins in wrong spot.

Town Centre - *Are there streets where some of the qualities of traditional strip-shopping could be encouraged by allowing for stopping, parking and slow traffic, and providing wide pavements?*

Whilst one of the groups indicated that it already exists, other groups noted that traffic should be slowed, that the southern side is nicer and more traditional and that it should not be built up like the northern side.

Parking - *Where does parking need to be improved, controlled or reduced?*

Improved at Shopping and Community Centres. Lack of separate parking for the Paddington Alehouse, restaurants and cafes. Parking should be timed.