



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

Belconnen Community Council: Hawker Woolworths Community Consultation

The Belconnen Community Council (BCC) is a not-for-profit, government-funded community organisation. The BCC is an advocacy group that represents the interests of its members and the community to the ACT Government on various matters affecting the people who live, work, and play in the Belconnen District.

As the voice of Belconnen for over three decades, with over 100,000 people in our catchment, we are intimately engaged with good and bad processes. We are uniquely positioned to offer observations on what works for all sides of the channels we engage with.

The BCC welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to Woolworths during their Hawker Shops Revitalisation consultation. To guide this submission, we engaged with the community via our public meetings, social media, and a survey that we letterboxed to Hawker, Scullin, Page, and Weetangera households.

Our community is diverse, which is reflected in the viewpoints during this consultation. This submission fulfils our requirements to gather diverse and broadly representative views when speaking on behalf of our community, and we aim to highlight areas where there are shared and differing perspectives.

Introduction

The Hawker Shops are viewed as extremely important to the local community. Respondents emphasised the convenience of having essential services close to home. The shops are crucial, especially for older people and those without private transportation. For example, the short travel times to the shops were noted, and some appreciated the alternative that the shops offered to large shopping centres like Westfield Belconnen.

The Hawker Shops were frequently described as a social and community hub where locals could bump into neighbours, meet friends for coffee, and support small businesses. The shops are seen as a central meeting place that foster a sense of community, belonging, and local identity. For many, it is their primary, or even their only, community space in the area.

There is a notable concern about the appearance and design of the shops. Many feel that the shops are tired-looking and need refurbishment to make the area safer, more appealing, and more vibrant. There is some hesitance, however, to extensive redevelopment, particularly proposals that would transform the shops into a larger, more impersonal shopping centre. Respondents value the shops' smaller, local, and intimate character and fear that certain kinds of development could erode this. The current ample parking is highly valued, and there is some fear that development could reduce parking access.



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

The Hawker Shops have untapped potential. People desire a more vibrant and enjoyable environment that could attract more visitors and serve as a genuine gathering place for the community. Suggestions included updating the shops to make them more modern and inviting while preserving their small-scale, community-focused character. In general, the community seems open to thoughtful, community-oriented redevelopment that would enhance, rather than detract from, the shops' role as a community hub.

The Hawker Shops are vital for Hawker and the surrounding suburbs, including new growth areas. Some respondents noted the importance of maintaining and possibly enhancing the shops in response to demographic changes, including a growing and diversifying population. There are concerns that continued neglect could lead the shops to decline, as has happened in other areas.

In summary, the community highly values the Hawker Shops as a convenient and vital resource that serves as an important social hub. There is a strong desire for refurbishment and thoughtful, community-oriented development that preserves and enhances the shops' character and role in the community.

There is a broad consensus that improvement is required

In our community survey, 85% of the respondents agreed with the statement, '*Do you believe that the current state of Hawker Shops requires improvement?*'. This significant majority indicates a widespread perception that the existing conditions of the Hawker Shops are subpar and necessitate enhancements. This suggests that there may be substantial room for improvement in the Hawker Shops and reflects the community mood felt by the BCC over recent years.

What is essential to stay at the Hawker Shops

Various themes emerged with broadly shared viewpoints among the community when responding to what aspects of the Hawker Shops are important to maintain. A substantial majority support retaining local businesses and essential services, maintaining the 'village feel', and ensuring adequate parking.

Many respondents emphasise the need for a strong presence of local businesses and services. Specific businesses and services frequently mentioned include the post office, pharmacy, butcher, bakeries, and restaurants. There is a desire for the Hawker Shops to retain its 'village' or 'community' feel. They value the existing ambience and scale of the shopping area and do not want it turned into a large, impersonal complex. Respondents repeatedly refer to words such as 'village feel', 'community nature', and 'local businesses'.

Many respondents strongly prefer the Hawker Shops to remain open-air, with outdoor seating, communal spaces, and a playground. There is an appreciation for the courtyard in the middle and the greenery.



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

Most respondents were clear about the need to maintain convenient and ample parking. Many respondents mention "easy parking", "adequate parking", and "free parking" as aspects of the Hawker Shops that should remain.

What needs improvement, and what could progress look like?

In response to our survey, we received a wealth of feedback from the community with insightful observations and suggestions, pointing to various areas where the Hawker Shops could potentially be enhanced. These views have been categorised into five themes that consider what better looks like, and where there are shared and differing views on implementing these improvements.

Improved shopping options, increasing business variety, and filling vacant spaces:

Many respondents suggest needing a better-stocked, larger, and more modern supermarket. Many people support the improvement of the supermarket, making it a popular perspective, but there is concern about potential negative impacts on smaller businesses. Several respondents generally felt that a better supermarket could attract more customers to the area and generate additional foot traffic for local shops. However, there is some concern about the potential for a larger supermarket to overshadow or push out smaller, local shops. Some respondents are happy with Woolworths's current size and offerings and oppose its massive expansion.

There is a strong call for a wider variety of shops and services with more cafes and restaurants, a larger post office, and returning essential services like a newsagency mentioned. Some people also desired clothing shops and more high-quality retail options.

The large number of vacant or under-utilised shops is a recurring concern, with suggestions to bring businesses into empty shops to revitalise the area. In response to the survey question regarding what types of businesses, services, or amenities should be included in any redevelopment plans across the Hawker Shops, suggestions include:

- Retail options like discount stores, independent greengrocers, and bulk food stores.
- Strong sentiment for encouraging small, local businesses to start in Hawker Village rather than chain brands. Suggestions include a newsagent, florist, butcher, gift shop, and hairdresser/salon.
- Additional dining options, including cafes, restaurants, bakeries, and pubs or bars.
- High-quality establishments, with multiple mentions of an artisan bakery and a good quality coffee shop/patisserie.
- Some opposition to franchise food services and a preference for independent, local options.
- Retention or introduction of professional services, such as a post office, banking facilities, medical practice, and chemist/pharmacy. A strong sentiment exists to keep essential services like these in the area.
- The potential to continue developing Hawker as a hub for health services.

Opinions are more divided regarding the extent of redevelopment and expansion, with some respondents expressing reservations about significant changes. Most respondents generally seem



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

open to or supportive of redevelopment and expansion (e.g., mentions of a new Woolworths, additional shops, or updated facilities). These respondents highlight the potential for attracting residents of nearby suburbs and other businesses, and advocate for a more modern and updated appearance. Some respondents seem satisfied with the current range of businesses and services and express opposition to significant changes, arguing for the refurbishment of the existing supermarket, suggesting it is a good size but needs updating and better quality selections. These respondents often emphasise the importance of the village character of Hawker and are resistant to large-scale commercial redevelopment.

Some respondents either didn't have a strong opinion, were open to various options, or found it hard to pre-judge commercial realities.

Enhancing community spaces and aesthetic appeal:

A substantial number of respondents expressed that the Hawker Shops appear old, run-down, and need a thorough renovation. They find the buildings outdated and uninviting, believing a significant overhaul could bring new life into the area. There is a general desire for modernising the space to make it more appealing, clean, and convenient by addressing specific concerns, including tired facades, broken footpaths, dated shop fronts, and general disrepair.

Widespread agreement exists on the desire for enhancements to the physical environment. There is a desire to transform the area into a more vibrant and welcoming 'third place' for residents as a community hub. They appreciate the idea of areas where the community can gather, and support enhanced green spaces, including landscaped and community gardens.

Suggestions include improvements to the central courtyard area and other open spaces with specific recommendations including more shaded and protected seating areas, updating public toilets and better use of dead space. Ideas include adding greenery (native micro forests, shrubs) to reduce heat and improve aesthetics, updating the façades of shops, creating gardens, and incorporating murals or street art. Additional suggestions include creating pedestrian-only areas, enhancing community gardens, and establishing spaces for leisure. Several respondents desire enhanced outdoor seating areas and alfresco dining spaces, which could contribute to a more inviting, communal atmosphere. There was also support for good active travel options, including a 'decent' bike parking area close to the entrance and safe for children.

Respondents emphasise the importance of considering amenities that would attract young people and families, given the proximity of schools and sporting fields. This includes improving play equipment for children and creating safe, welcoming spaces where families can gather. There is consensus among respondents on the need to update and secure playgrounds for children, making them safer and more modern. This should be complemented with family-friendly seating arrangements.



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

Safety and accessibility:

Several respondents mention safety concerns, including lighting in parking areas, pedestrian safety, and the conditions of playgrounds. There are calls for graffiti removal, better maintenance of public spaces, and cleaner, more secure environments.

Parking:

Parking remains one of the most essential components of a seamless shopping experience. To better understand preferences regarding parking at Hawker Shops, a question was included in our survey to determine which factors they value the most. There was a clear preference for ample parking spaces and convenient proximity to the shops. The convenience of finding a parking space without waiting or extensive searching, and not walking long distances from their vehicles is important. However, accessibility, safety, and ease of finding parking also play a crucial role.

What is valued about parking at Hawker Shops

This graph visualises the responses received to the question "Rank the following aspects of parking at Hawker Shops in the order that you value them? "

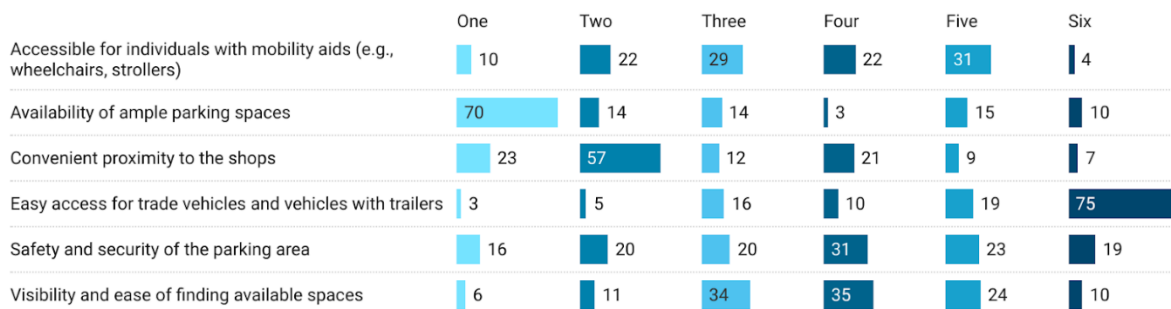
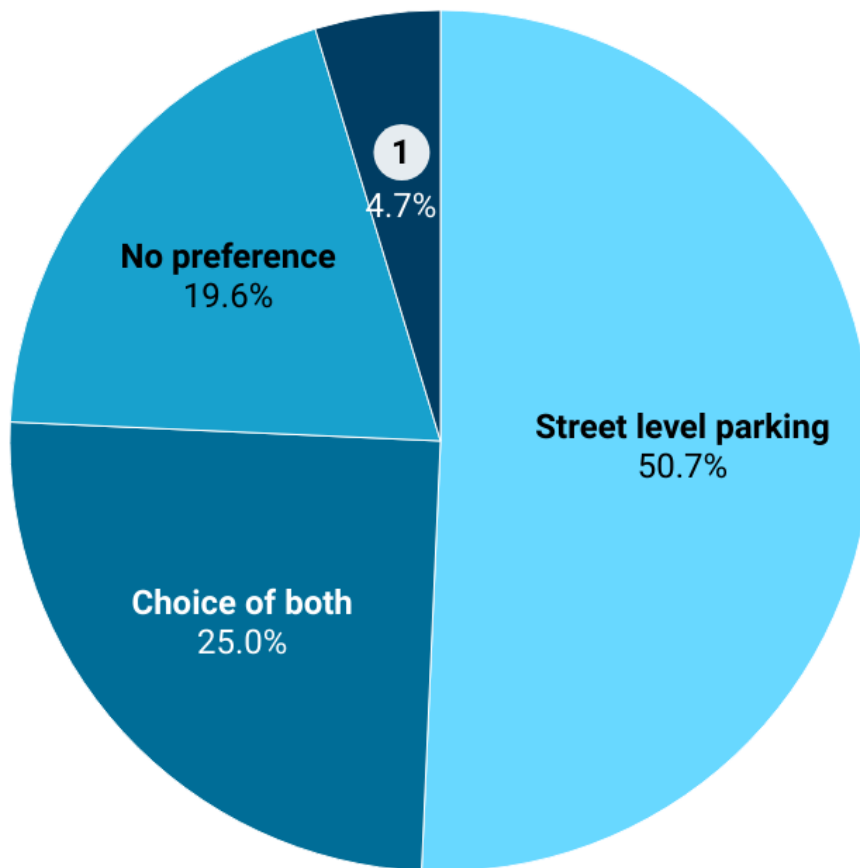


Chart: The Belconnen Community Council • Source: Belconnen Community Council Survey • Created with Datawrapper



Preferences for different types of parking

This graph visualises the responses received to the question "Do you prefer street-level parking or basement parking?"



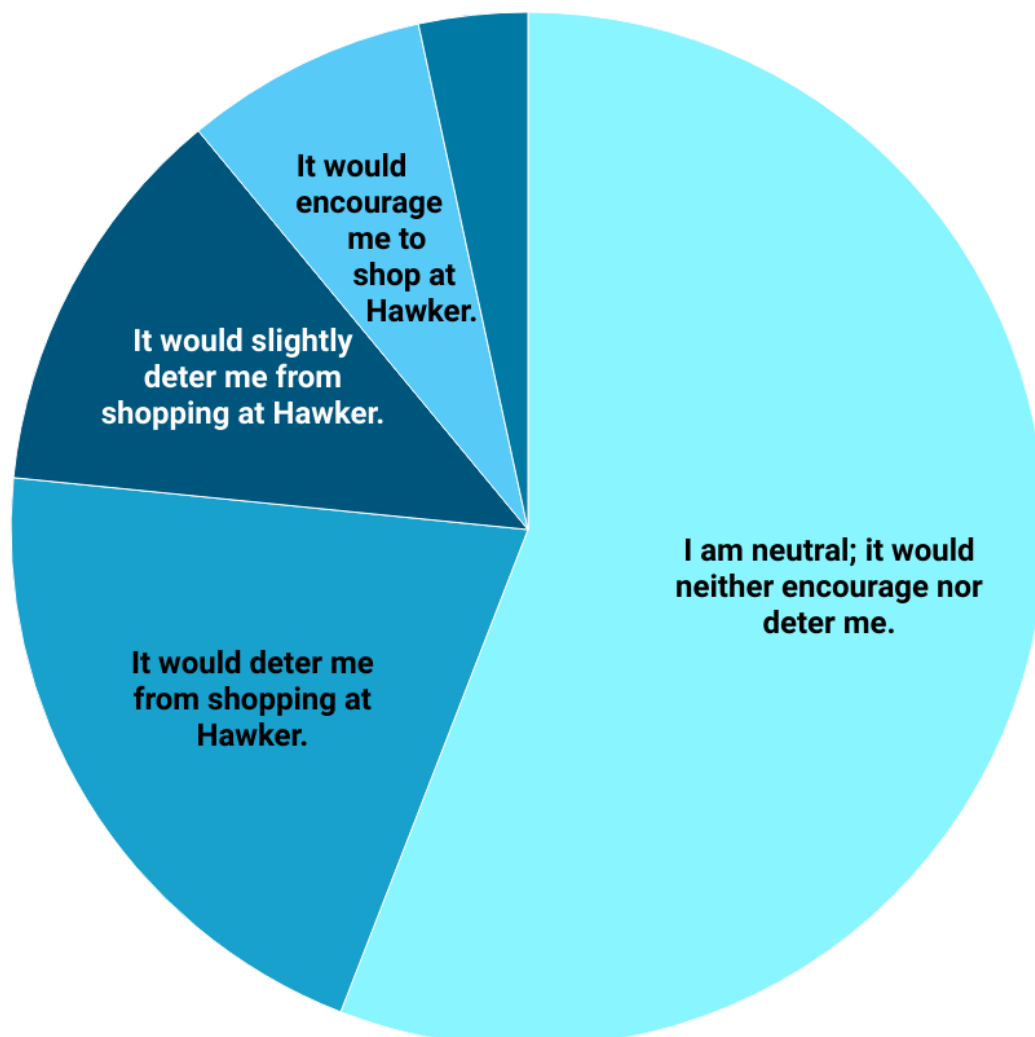
1 Basement parking



Would requiring an escalator or lift to access the shops impact visits to Hawker Shops

This graph visualises the responses received to the question "Would requiring the use of an escalator or lift to access the shops encourage or deter you from shopping at Hawker?"

- I am neutral; it would neither encourage nor deter me. (55.9%)**
- It would deter me from shopping at Hawker. (20.7%)**
- It would slightly deter me from shopping at Hawker. (12.4%)**
- It would encourage me to shop at Hawker. (7.6%)**
- It would slightly encourage me to shop at Hawker. (3.4%)**





BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

A significant number of respondents are opposed to the idea of replacing ground parking with basement parking. They value the convenience and quick accessibility of ground-level parking and express concern that basement parking could detract from the community and village feel of the area. For example, one respondent mentioned that basement parking would make it less likely for them to visit the shops and takes too long. Some respondents also raise safety concerns, fearing that basement parking might be less secure and could encourage antisocial behaviour.

Some respondents are open to basement parking under certain conditions. These conditions include ensuring the parking is free, clean, safe, well-lit, and designed to accommodate many disability parking spots and wider spots. Some respondents also insist that the basement parking should be easy to navigate and that street-level parking should still be available, preferably for quick shopping trips. For instance, one person mentions that they are okay with basement parking if it is well-lit and disability-friendly.

Some respondents favour basement parking, citing that it is a reasonable and expected solution in line with other redevelopments. They believe basement parking could allow for more efficient land use, leading to more green spaces at ground level, more customers for businesses, and an increase in the variety of businesses. For example, one respondent mentioned that basement parking would be a great idea if it resulted in better shopping options.

Several respondents have neutral feelings towards the issue. They don't express strong feelings for or against basement parking and are more concerned with sufficient parking availability that is accessible for people of all mobilities.

Some concerns about the process and potential challenges associated with the transition to basement parking were raised. These concerns include the disruption that construction might cause, how long parking would be unavailable during construction, and questions about how the existing land for car parking would be used in future development.

A few respondents propose alternative solutions, such as a combination of both ground and basement parking, building the shops over undercroft-style parking, and focusing on improving the current parking arrangements.

In summary, there is a significant division among respondents, with a notable proportion opposed to basement parking, citing convenience, community feeling, and safety as key reasons. However, there is also a significant number who either support or conditionally accept the concept of basement parking, provided it is well-designed and maintains amenities and access. Some respondents remain neutral or have specific concerns about the process and implementation of such a change.

Development scale:

Opinions are more divided regarding the extent of redevelopment and expansion. While most respondents favour renovation and redevelopment to modernise the area, there are differing opinions on the scale and nature of this development. Some responses emphasise the need for



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

major overhaul and expansion, while others express reservations about significant changes, with a small minority outright opposing any redevelopment.

Those responses with reservations express a preference for maintaining the small community shopping centre feel and worry about overdevelopment and the potential loss of the area's current character. Some respondents explicitly state a preference for the area to remain low-rise and express opposition to high-rise development. In contrast, the need for density and building height does not seem to be a significant concern for other respondents.

Some respondents compare Hawker to other areas, mentioning that Hawker is "suitable for higher density" and that it should follow models applied in other centres, such as Jamison. A minority of respondents favour high-rise development, citing the potential for private funding and business opportunities as positive aspects and allowing local residents to downsize while staying in the area.

A few respondents indicated that they have no strong views on this issue or suggest that they are open to changes as the area evolves.

In response to a question regarding the imposition of height restrictions on redevelopment plans across Hawker Village, the survey responses demonstrate varying opinions, with a majority advocating for some form of height restrictions and a minority being either neutral or against restrictions.

A maximum height of 2 to 3 stories was the most common suggestion. They believe anything above this would be out of character with the existing village and surrounding residential area. For instance, numerous respondents mention "2 stories maximum" or "3 stories is probably the maximum height" as the desired limit. Some respondents say a maximum of 4-5 stories, conditional on location and design, while some mention a single-story maximum. A small minority supported redevelopment of up to 6 stories.

A few respondents expressed conditional support for height restrictions, often depending on specific circumstances. Some respondents suggested that they would defer to the views of those most likely affected by the redevelopment, particularly concerning sunlight or shadow effects. Others indicated that the height could be increased if conditions, such as incorporating well-designed residential developments or sufficient parking, were met. Any redevelopment must address issues like potential reduction of sunlight (shadowing effects), the creation of wind tunnels, increased traffic and parking needs, and the extinguishing of suburban character.

A notable portion of respondents expressed that they do not believe height restrictions should be in place. These respondents trust the architects, developers, and the ACT Government to determine the appropriate height. Others feel that the Hawker Shops are suitably distanced from residential areas, negating potential issues with shadowing and aesthetics. For instance, one respondent stated, "No, I don't think there should be any height limits. Let the architects and developers work out what's best."



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

The survey responses regarding the potential large-scale redevelopment of the Hawker Shops area illustrate a range of opinions.

Support for large-scale redevelopment:

A substantial proportion of respondents are in favour of large-scale redevelopment. They perceive this as an opportunity to significantly revitalise and improve the Hawker Shops. They desire a state-of-the-art suburban centre that could make Hawker a popular destination. Some respondents specifically mention the potential benefits of large redevelopment in light of population projections for Belconnen over the coming decades. Examples include: "Yes, large-scale development would definitely improve Hawker Shops. It is old and run down," and "Yes. We wouldn't have to go to Jamison or Kippax for a greater variety of goods."

Opposition to large-scale redevelopment:

Some respondents oppose large-scale redevelopment. These respondents often emphasise the importance of maintaining the current 'village feel' of Hawker Shops and express concerns that large-scale redevelopment would destroy this ambience. They argue that the Hawker Shops are meant to be a local shopping area and that a large-scale redevelopment would lead to problems such as increased traffic, excessive competition with nearby shopping centres, and a potential influx of empty and failed businesses. Some feel that Woolworths' expansion is unnecessary given the proximity of other larger supermarkets. Examples of this perspective include: "Large-scale redevelopment would NOT be appropriate for this location," and "No, large-scale redevelopment would destroy the current village feel." This perspective is less common in the responses but represents a distinct counterpoint to the dominant call for substantial redevelopment.

Advocacy for moderate improvements:

Another significant viewpoint is the call for moderate improvements rather than large-scale redevelopment. These respondents often suggest that a massive overhaul is unnecessary, undesirable, or unsustainable. They propose focused enhancements such as better shops, improved outdoor spaces, and more convenient facilities without drastically altering the scale and character of the area. Examples include: "I believe that a revitalisation is better than a redevelopment" and "Modernise the existing centre."

Differing opinions on residential development:

Another area of differing views is incorporating residential units, particularly high-rise apartments, in any redevelopment. Some respondents explicitly caution against this, seeing potential issues with noise and the alteration of the area's character. In contrast, some respondents tacitly accept residential development as a necessary part of the process.

In summary, while there is consensus on the need for improvement in the Hawker Shops area, the scale and nature of this improvement are key points of significant divergence among respondents.



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

Summary

There is a general consensus among the community that the Hawker Shops could benefit from some form of improvement. Many respondents desire a more vibrant and inviting shopping and community area. Examples include suggestions for modernising the existing centre, increasing the variety of goods and services available, and making aesthetic and practical improvements such as clean and attractive public spaces, more green spaces, outdoor seating, and better car parking facilities.

A recurring theme in the responses is the desire to retain the 'village feel' and character of the existing shopping area. The community values the open-air nature of the shopping centre, the convenience and ease of the current setup, and the local small businesses. They are worried about the area becoming a 'corporate facility' and losing its charm. Several people specifically mentioned not wanting a 'concrete block' development style.

A common theme is a call for green spaces and high-quality landscaping with native plantings, trees, and garden spaces. There is a consensus on wanting the redevelopment to have aesthetically pleasing and environmentally considerate designs. They want any redevelopment to be visually pleasing, not just a plain concrete structure, with any new design considering natural aspects, like sunlight.

Several respondents indicated that they do not want the redevelopment to result in losing open spaces, trees, or natural light. They desire more greenery and soft landscaping and oppose large concrete and paved areas. Some respondents explicitly stated they do not want to lose the current trees and plants.

Parking is a contentious issue in the responses. There is a strong sentiment that maintaining easy access and sufficient free parking is a crucial component of any redevelopment. Some respondents want to avoid more car parks and are concerned about increased local traffic, and the potential safety issues this could pose for pedestrians. Some suggest a need for better-designed parking and access.

There is significant support for upgraded public toilets, with many respondents noting the need for cleaner and safer facilities. Some respondents also want improved parenting rooms and bicycle parking options.

Some respondents are explicitly against a Woolworths-led or focused redevelopment, citing a nostalgic preference for how the area used to be and a resistance to the expansion of supermarket monopolies. They fear the development might harm smaller, independent businesses and the area's unique character.

Several respondents indicated they need clarification about what is being proposed in the redevelopment. They want more information and better communication about the plans, with some respondents hesitant to offer specific suggestions.



BELCONNEN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Building a stronger community

Conclusion

This survey indicates that while there is considerable consensus on several fronts (supporting existing businesses, improved public spaces, and retention of essential services), there are also differences in the community's vision for the future of Hawker Village, mainly regarding the scale and nature of redevelopment.

There is universal consensus among respondents that any redevelopment must be community-focused. There is some scepticism toward Woolworths' role in the redevelopment, with concerns that the company's priorities may not align with the community's priorities, and lead to adverse outcomes for local businesses and the community.

Woolworths and the ACT Government must consider the longer-term future for the entire Hawker Shops precinct to ensure any redevelopment maximises the community benefit.

Strong transparency and extensive ongoing community consultation throughout this process and any redevelopment project are essential to bringing the community along and achieving good outcomes. This cannot be done as just a formality, but as a genuine attempt at engaging the community.

This submission attempts to capture the varied perspectives of the community members in response to potential redevelopment in Hawker Village, with a pronounced call for thoughtful and community-oriented development. The BCC's survey, its responses and submission have provided high-level commentary with more specific feedback only possible when more information is available; it is essential for further community consultation to encourage this feedback from the community.

The BCC is optimistic for the future of the Hawker Shops but acknowledges that redevelopment needs to be done right, and put the community first. We look forward to further engaging with relevant stakeholders of this project to promote the best outcome for the community.

Kind regards

Lachlan Butler

Chair

Belconnen Community Council

web.facebook.com/belcouncil | Ph: 0438 458 220