

Proposal to lease Council-owned land at 1F Ashline Street, Wollert

Engagement Summary



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1. Introduction and Background

The City of Whittlesea recognises that every person has a right to affordable, safe and stable housing to support their livelihood and sense of belonging.

Access to local affordable housing is important to our community and Council research shows that there is an urgent need for 3600 additional affordable homes in our municipality.

The solution to issues of housing affordability in the City of Whittlesea requires multiple strategies and partnerships, however, local councils have an important role in facilitating the delivery of high-quality affordable housing developments for households on very low to moderate incomes.

Council is considering leasing the land at 1F Ashline Street in Wollert to a community housing organisation for an affordable housing development to provide homes for local people. The land at 1F Ashline Street has been identified as the most suitable option for facilitating Affordable Housing on Council-owned land due to its proximity to services and public transport, and development potential.

The proposed leasing arrangement is to lease the site to a Community Housing Organisation for up to a 50-year period at a peppercorn rent. The Community Housing Organisation would then develop and manage approximately 16 and 36 homes depending on the layout and design, in line with planning provisions for the site.

In accordance with Section 115 of the Local Government Act 2020, community engagement must be undertaken prior to leasing any Council-owned land. This report provides an overview of the outcomes of community engagement that took place between September 2021 and July 2022 regarding the proposed lease of Council owned land for use as Affordable Housing at 1F Ashline Street Wollert.

2. Communication and Engagement Approach Overview

A range of communication and engagement activities were undertaken to inform, consult and involve community members. The engagement process was conducted in two phases. Throughout both phases of the engagement, the 'Local Affordable Housing for Local People' webpage was active and regularly updated. Council also had ongoing email correspondence and phone calls with stakeholders and community members.

The first phase of engagement took place during lock downs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that the engagement was conducted online only and included a web-based information session and a survey. Conducting the engagement solely online was not Council's preferred approach given there are likely many new terms, theories, and ideas for participants to learn and comment on.

Based on community feedback and Council's own assessment, the engagement was then extended into 2022 for a second phase. This allowed for face-to-face engagement and in-depth exploration of key ideas, opportunities and concerns with the proposal. This was achieved by using small focus groups and a community drop-in session that was facilitated and staffed by content experts and people with lived experience of social and affordable housing.

Table 1 on the following page provides an overview of the key communications and engagement activities.

Table 1 Overview of communication and engagement activities

	How We Engaged	Stakeholders targeted	Description	Date	# of Participants
Phase 1 and 2	Engage Whittlesea Site Presence	Wider community	Published the 'Local Affordable Housing for Local People' site to provide information and an opportunity to submit feedback on the proposal. The site included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey tool • Frequently Asked Questions • Detailed information about the proposal • Tool to sign up to the proposal email list 	July 2021 – September 2022	5788 visits
	Phone Calls	Residents, wider community, and key stakeholders	Phone calls with concerned residents and key stakeholders.	September 2021 – September 2022	15+ phone calls
	Email Correspondence	Wider community	Email updates on the proposal sent to the proposal email list. Questions and feedback on the proposal received via email.	September 2021 – September 2022	24 emails received
Phase 1	Letter drop	Immediate neighbours	Letterbox drop to immediately impacted residents informing them of the proposal and providing a link to the survey and information session. The letter also contained the project brochure and a printed copy of the survey.	8 September 2021	81 letters

	Online Survey	Immediate neighbours, wider community, and key stakeholders	Online via the engage page, the online survey provided community members with an opportunity to share their views on the proposal and more detailed feedback.	September – October 2021	1031 respondents
	Media Release	Wider community	Media release inviting feedback on the proposal via the Council website.	8 September 2021	1 media release
	Information session	Letter drop to immediate neighbours Community members who registered for the event	For community members and stakeholders to hear about the proposal in detail and have pre-submitted questions answered. A recording of the information session was uploaded to the Council YouTube page following the event.	6 October 2021	19 participants 478 YouTube Views
	Letter drop	Immediate neighbours	Letter to update community members that engagement has been extended.	6 December 2021	81 letters
Phase 2	Focus groups	Letter drop to immediate neighbours – 400m radius Concerned individuals (project email list)	Small focus group sessions to gain a deeper understanding and discuss views held regarding the proposal.	1, 4 & 7 June 2022	22 participants
	Community drop-in session	Letter drop to immediate neighbours – 400m radius Concerned individuals (project email list)	A drop-in session for community members to ask questions, give feedback and gain information about the proposal.	16 July 2022	42 attendees

3. Participant demographics

This engagement generated significant community interest. Overall, 1112 people participated in an engagement activity by completing a survey or attending an information session, focus group or community drop in. Another 5916 people stayed informed by emailing or telephoning for information, visiting the website, or watching the information session video recording.

People that engaged in the project were asked to provide some demographic data but were not required to do so. Most of the data was collected from the online survey with 1031 responses, with some additional data coming from community drop in participants with 42 responses.

Tenure

Compared to the Whittlesea's population, this engagement had an overrepresentation of homeowners with a mortgage and underrepresentation of private renters and social/public housing renters.

Table 2 Participants housing tenure

Tenure type	Respondents (%)	Whittlesea population (%)	Difference
I live in a property that has been purchased with a mortgage	73.8%	43.6%	+30.4%
I live in a property that I (or a household member) owns outright	19.2%	28.7%	-9.5%
I live in a private rental property	6.0%	24.3%	-18.3%
I live in a social/public rental property	0.3%	1.2%	-0.9

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census

Age

Comparisons between the age of respondents between the Whittlesea population shows those aged 26 to 45 are overrepresented, while those aged 16 to 25 and those aged 46 and over are under-represented.

Table 3 Participant age

Age	Respondents (%)	Whittlesea population (%)	Difference
16-25	5.8%	13.1%	-7.50%
26-35	32.5%	17.3%	+14.89%
36-45	44.7%	14.5%	+30.23%
46-55	9.7%	12.1%	-2.22%
56-65	4.1%	9.5%	-5.13%
66 years or over	1.1%	11%	-9.77%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census

Gender

The gender of the participants aligns relatively closely to the Whittlesea population except for a slight under representation of people identifying as Female.

Table 4 Participant gender

Gender	Respondents (%)	Whittlesea population (%)	Difference
Female	45.3%	49.4%	-4.10%
Male	50.0%	50.6%	-0.60%
Prefer not to answer	47%	-	-

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census

4. Key findings

This section presents the key findings from all the engagement activities. Overall, the findings indicate that most participants did not support of the proposal. This was consistent across both stages of the engagement for the proposal to lease council-owned land at 1F Ashline Street in Wollert.

Below, Figure 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate how support for the proposal varied by participant's tenure and age group.

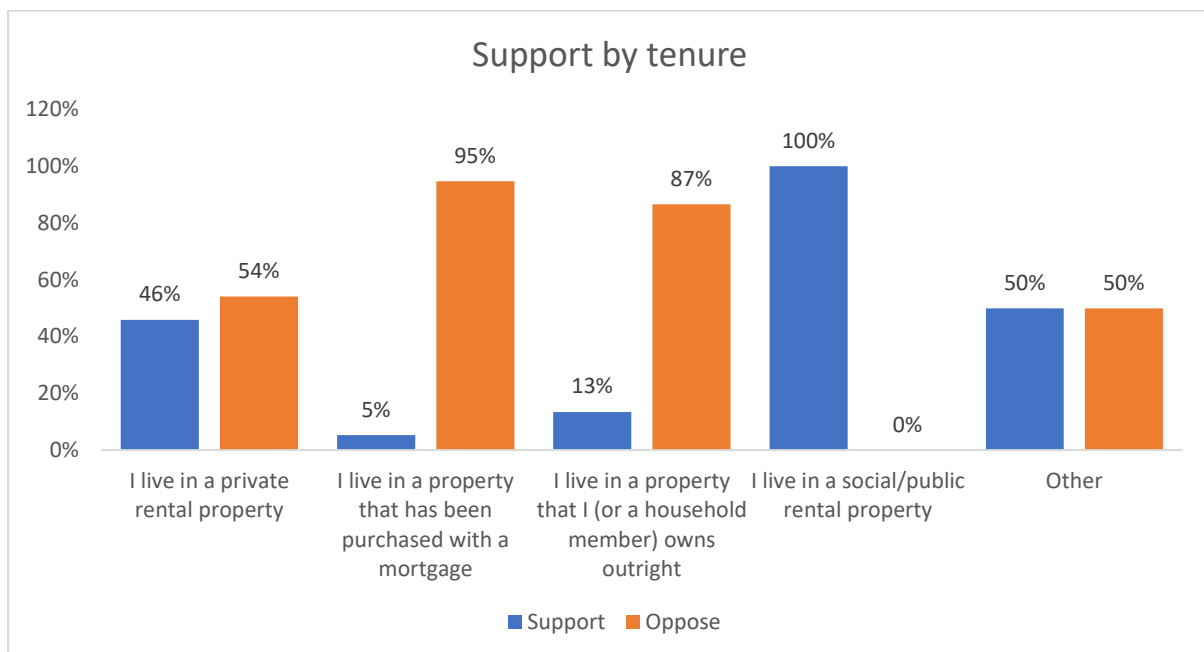


Figure 1 Support of the proposal by tenure of the participants

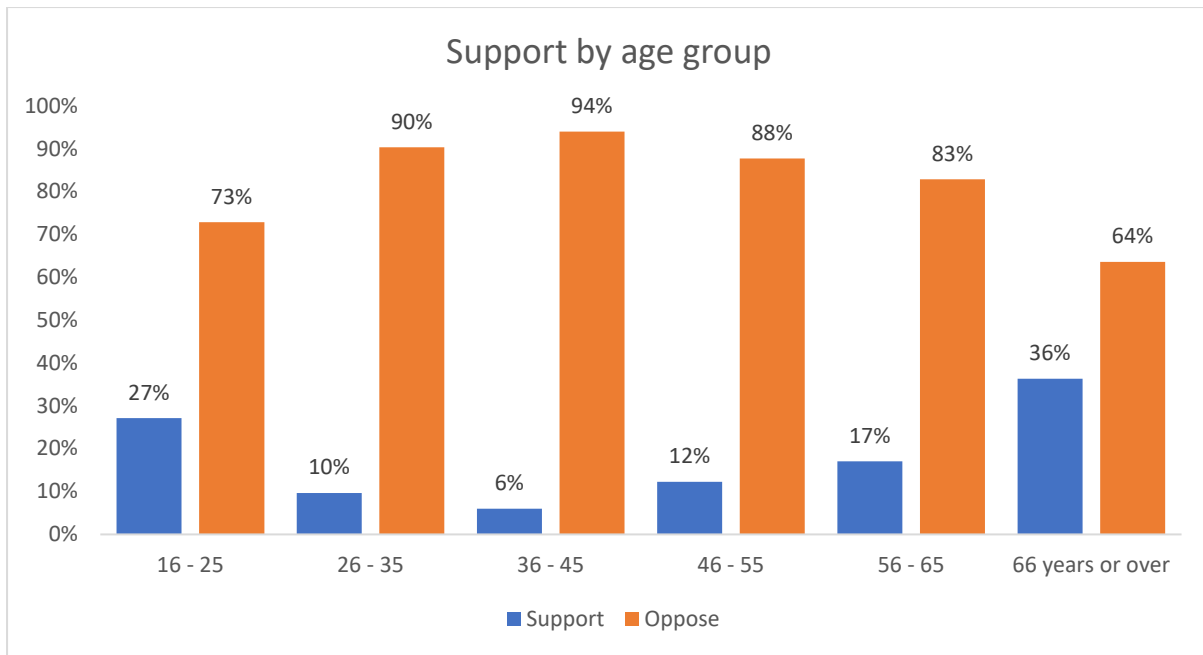


Figure 2 Support of the proposal by age group of the participants

Engagement themes

The themes and issues below have been summarised and collated from all engagement activities across the two phases.

Safety and crime

An issue raised across both stages of the engagement was the view that the proposed Affordable Housing would impact on safety and increase crime in the neighbourhood. There were some perceptions expressed about social housing tenants more broadly in relation to the concern that tenants of Affordable Housing would contribute to an increase in crime in the locality and impact on a broader sense of wellbeing and safety.

Selecting the appropriate site

A frequent issue raised was the perception that the location is inappropriate for Affordable Housing and that it should be delivered in an alternative location. Community engagement participants raised concerns that the site is inappropriate for Affordable Housing due to its proximity to a school and lack of infrastructure in the area to service the development, including public transportation and other social infrastructure.

Economic impacts

Throughout the community engagement process participants expressed concern that the Affordable Housing development would negatively impact on existing property values.

Traffic and car parking

Participants were commonly concerned that the Affordable Housing development would negatively impact on traffic and car parking in the area. Community engagement participants expressed that the project would increase traffic and congestion, present a road safety threat, and would impact on car parking provision in the area.

Appearance of the development

Many community engagement participants across both stages of the engagement were concerned that the scale, density, height, form and look of the development would not be appropriate for the area. Participants raised the specific concern that a high-density development would not fit in with the existing low-scale area and would contribute to over-population within the neighbourhood.

Alternative proposed

Some community engagement participants suggested alternative uses for the site that they believed would better serve the existing community. Respondents suggested a range of options, including a library, swimming pool, sports facility, park, community centre or private residential development.

Council performance

Many community engagement participants raised concerns about Council's process on this proposal, including the decision to deliver the Community Activity Centre on the adjacent school site and the overall engagement process on the proposal.

Support for Affordable Housing

Those who supported the proposal raised several factors to support their position. These include the potential for the proposed Affordable Housing development to support vulnerable people who are socially and economically disadvantaged, single parents, families and people experiencing homelessness. Participants who supported the proposal also stated that Affordable Housing is a social right and that everyone deserves access to housing. The broad and local need for Affordable Housing was also cited as a reason to support the proposal.