

Consultation report

**Draft Eastern Hill Activation
Master Plan**

Evaluation of public submissions

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Report prepared by Lightbulb Consulting, December 2022

Background

The Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan has been developed following feedback from the community to enhance the facilities and offerings for a variety of users of Eastern Hill.

AlburyCity Council resolved to place the Draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan out on public exhibition at the Council meeting on 8 August 2022.

The draft Eastern Hill Activation Master Plan was publicly exhibited for 56 days.

To remain impartial and to demonstrate transparency in the assessment of the results, Lightbulb Consulting was engaged to review the feedback.

This has involved individually reading each submission and evaluating the level of support for or against the project, as well as delving into elements of the project which were particularly supported, or which were not.

About the feedback

A total of 606 submissions were received by AlburyCity. Of these, some had been received twice and others were multiple submissions from the same contributor. These were filtered using the contributor's name and the email address used. This was a manual process, and all care was taken to eliminate double ups, but some may remain due to the same contributor sending from different email addresses.

The feedback came via the Council's Have Your Say website, letters and emails.

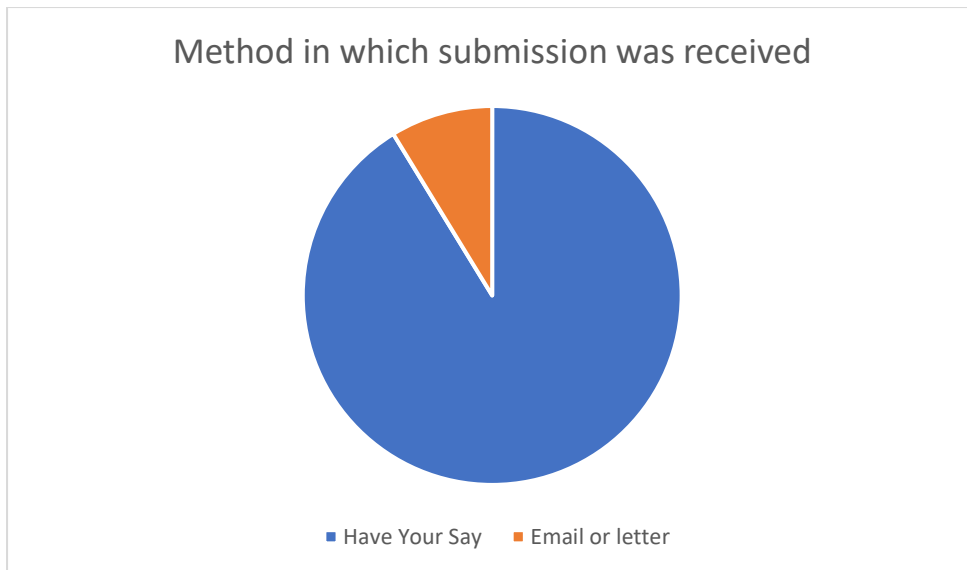
In total, there were 522 contributions evaluated.

Upon reviewing the feedback, it has been noted by AlburyCity staff that several of the claims made in the feedback are unsubstantiated, which may have increased community concern about the project.

Going forward, AlburyCity will address these misconceptions to ensure all community members are fully informed about all elements of the plans and what is proposed, versus what public perception may be.

How the feedback was received

Of the feedback, 553 submissions were received via the Have Your Say portal. The remaining 53 were received via email, paper-based version of the Have your Say form, or letter to Council or Councillors. This is shown graphically below.



The opportunity to give feedback was promoted widely using the following tools:

- Weekly social media posts through AlburyCity's channels – these were also shared by many interested in the project.
- AlburyCity website
- Community information sessions
- Media releases
- On-site signage
- Letterbox drop

About the evaluation process

Each piece of feedback received by AlburyCity was evaluated against key themes and a consideration given to the level of support or opposition to the proposal.

It is important to remember the following:

- Some submissions did not contain enough information to allocate them to a theme. While these were small in number, it should be noted that these have not been able to be evaluated, or in some instances, it was not clear where the contributor's sentiment about the project lay.
- Some submissions received contained many themes. With these, the top themes raised were included in the assessment. This is not to discard all the issues raised in the submissions, but merely to help with the assessment process and provide a measurable way of cataloguing feedback.
- Some people wrote numerous submissions. Where possible, this has been collated into the one set of feedback. As indicated above, this has not been a manual process so a small number may have been overlooked.
- The names of AlburyCity staff have been removed.

- In some cases, some minor changes were made to correct grammatical errors in an effort to improve readability. In no way has this changed the integrity of the message from the submitter.

In reviewing each submission, the main themes were extracted. Where feedback was of significant length, the three or four major themes were taken from the submission. Where feedback was minimal, only one theme, and in some cases no theme, was taken.

Themes

In accessing the data, the following themes were used. A brief explanation is provided below

1. Loss of amenity

In many instances, this was a theme presented by those who currently use the Eastern Hill area or live near it. The perceived loss of amenity covers a range of matters, including their concern the area would become overused, the peaceful and tranquil setting would be interrupted or the quality of their enjoyment of the site would be negatively impacted.

2. Supportive of regeneration efforts

This feedback related to plans AlburyCity has outlined in regard to improving the natural environment, particularly through planning vegetation and restoring the area to its former state.

3. Supportive of improved accessibility

This relates to better access for a wide range of community members, including cyclists, those with prams, people with disabilities and those walking the area.

4. Concerned at impact of mountain bikes

This relates to the concern raised about mountain bikes damaging the site, presenting dangers to other users or negatively impacting the enjoyment of others of the site.

5. Concerned about consultation process

This relates to both the process to date and the process going forward. Many people, particularly those who live on Eastern Hill, felt they were not given sufficient opportunity to provide feedback in a timely matter. Others raised concerns about the transparency of the process and the desire to be further consulted about the matter.

6. Will cause traffic issues

This related to increased traffic in the area and the risk to pedestrians, other road users and cyclists.

7. Impact on fauna

This relates to concerns about the ongoing wellbeing of native animals that live in the Eastern Hill area.

8. Impact on flora

This related to the negative impact on native vegetation in the Eastern Hill area.

9. Impact on environment

This included issues such as erosion, degradation of natural environment and damage which would be caused. It also often included the risk to flora and fauna and should be read in conjunction with these categories.

10. Will benefit general community

This includes members of the public for which access may currently be limited, as well as the increased visitation and tourism activity.

11. Financial impact

This relates to the cost to ratepayers and AlburyCity as an organisation. It often related to the total cost of the project, as well as the ongoing financial impact.

12. Safety of pedestrians or general community

This relates to the risk to walkers and runners posed by increased activity on the site. It also covers issues such as graffiti and vandalism and community safety manners.

13. Support infrastructure improvements

This signalled people's support for both hard and soft infrastructure in the Eastern Hill areas, including upgrade of currently installed infrastructure.

14. Cultural significance to Aboriginal peoples

This relates to the need to further consult with Aboriginal people or demonstrate that the cultural significance of the area has been considered in the development of the plans.

15. Accessibility for emergency services

This related to the accessibility issues which would be presented to fire, ambulance, police and rescue services in the case of an emergency.

16. Wants redevelopment to be staged

This relates to people's concern that the development should take place over several years, often associated with cost.

17. Concerned with ongoing maintenance

This relates to concerns that public places throughout Albury are not maintained to people's expectation and the Eastern Hill development will be neglected.

18. Level of upgrade not warranted

This concern was in relation to the scope of the entire plan, with many feeling that such basic improvements to infrastructure would suffice.

19. Support mountain bike elements of plan

These submissions demonstrated support for mountain biking being part of the plan.

20. Preserve memorial

This related to the Elke Black memorial seat and the wish for this to be retained.

Results:

Theme	Times this was a major theme of feedback
Loss of amenity	140
Concerned at impact of mountain bikes	134
Support infrastructure improvements	143
Will benefit general community	98
Concerned about consultation process	84
Impact on environment	70
Level of upgrade not warranted	48
Support mountain bike elements of plan	37
Supportive of improved accessibility	30
Impact on fauna	29
Will cause traffic issues	21
Concerned with ongoing maintenance	22
Safety of pedestrians or general community	19
Preserve memorial	19
Financial impact	17
Impact on flora	17
Cultural significance to Aboriginal peoples	16
Supportive of regeneration efforts	13
Wants redevelopment to be staged	4
Accessibility for emergency services	2

Evaluation measures

As mentioned, each submission was read and then evaluated. The following criteria was used.

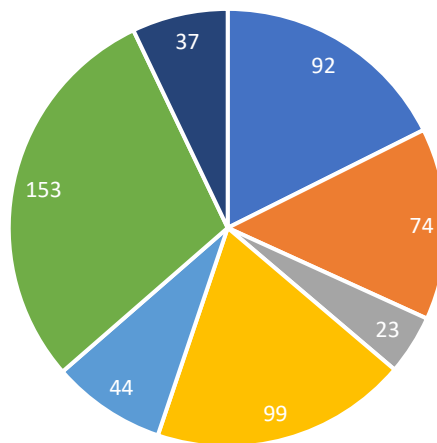
- Strongly for proposal - Highly supportive of all aspects of the proposal with no changes.
- Generally, for proposal - Supportive of proposal.
- For proposal, but with changes - General concepts met needs, but feel some changes would be necessary and beneficial.
- Neutral - Neither for nor against proposal.
- Against proposal but could support with changes - Currently not supportive of proposal but feel changes to the concepts could alter this.
- Generally, against proposal - Does not support concept as it stands.
- Strongly against proposal - Would not support under any circumstances.

It should be noted that in many cases, there was only subtle differences between the categories.

Categorisation can only take place on the submission and while some people may have vehemently articulated their feelings, others may have been more subtle in demonstrating their case. This should be taken into consideration by those reading the results.

Results

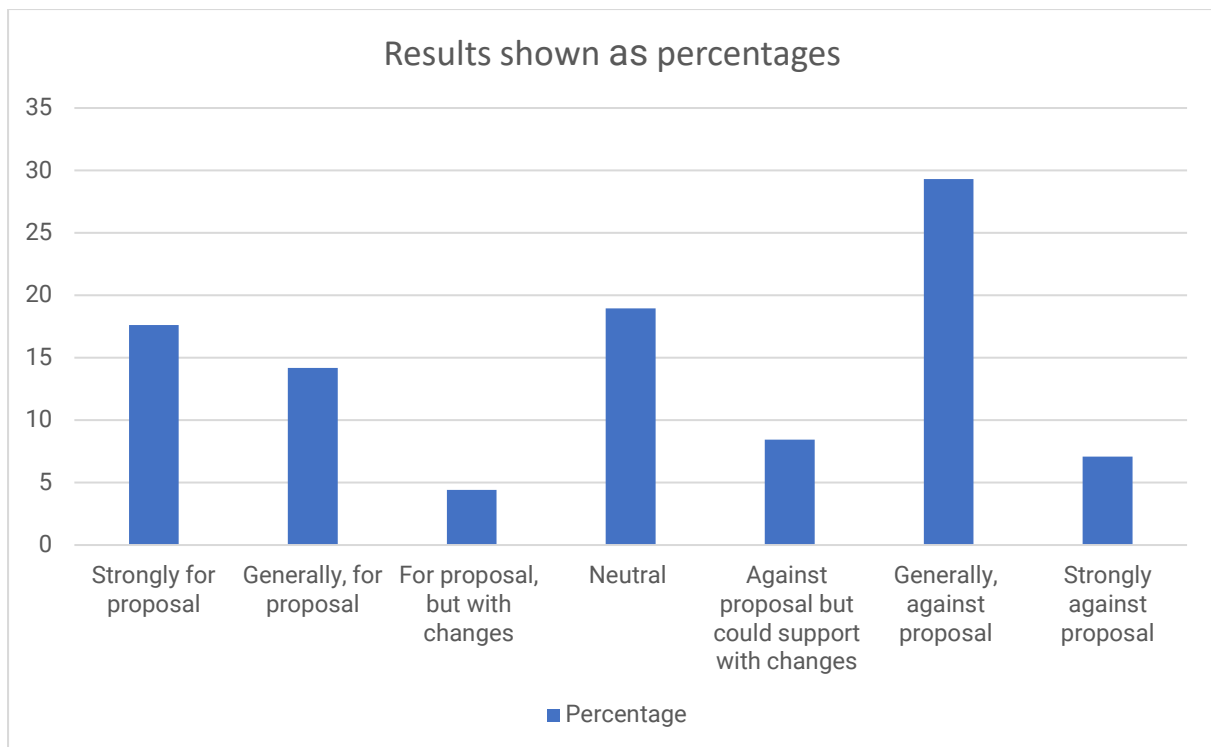
Theme	Times this was a major theme of feedback
Strongly for proposal	92
Generally, for proposal	74
For proposal, but with changes	23
Neutral	99
Against proposal but could support with changes	44
Generally, against proposal	153
Strongly against proposal	37
TOTAL	522



- Strongly for proposal
- Generally, for proposal
- For proposal, but with changes
- Neutral
- Against proposal but could support with changes
- Generally, against proposal
- Strongly against proposal

The following shows this data presented as a percentage*:

Theme	Percentage
Strongly for proposal	17.62
Generally, for proposal	14.18
For proposal, but with changes	4.41
Neutral	18.96
Against proposal but could support with changes	8.43
Generally, against proposal	29.31
Strongly against proposal	7.09



Feedback analysis:

General feedback:

While the opposition to the plan from some sectors is undisputed, there are also many people who see the advantages of the proposal, particularly the benefits it will bring to the wider community.

Many submissions spoke about increased access being a huge advantage, particularly to those who use prams or who have a disability. Others articulated their feelings about it being a big winner in terms of tourism offering.

There is very evident support for the improvement of infrastructure on Eastern Hill. Many felt that an upgrade of toilet amenities and the installation of modern barbecue, picnic and seating areas would greatly improve the general appeal of the areas. As well, the enhancement of the access to the natural vistas through the use of lookouts was widely supported.

Many mountain bikers felt the proposal would be advantageous in promoting and developing their sport. While Nail Can Hill currently offers this, it was generally felt by those who enjoy the sport that Albury and surrounds had the potential to attract many more riders by enhancing the offering.

While the statistics show some support for the improvements at Eastern Hill, there is strong opposition to the project. This centres around a number of major issues as shown by the themes used, however the most divisive is the impact which mountain bike activities will have.

Many of the submissions came from people who identified as living in the area or who regularly enjoy the natural environs of Eastern Hill. Loss of amenity and the impact on their lifestyle, whether this be from increased traffic, concerns about overuse of the hill precinct or the loss of what they enjoy and appreciate about the area were apparent throughout the submissions. This can be further demonstrated with the formation of a community group, Friends of Eastern Hill, which has formed to take a cohesive approach against the proposal.

Many of the submissions were well-researched and considered in their content, while several people made more than one submission to demonstrate their thoughts about the project.

However, as identified earlier in this report, AlburyCity staff have identified in the feedback several misconceptions and inaccuracies around what is being proposed to be done as part of the Eastern Hill activation plans. This appears to have added to the community angst around the project and will need to be clearly addressed and corrected in going forward with any elements of the plan.

The community engagement process which was used during the project was also highly contentious. Many people who made submissions felt they had not been engaged with by AlburyCity in a meaningful way, particularly those who live in the neighbourhood. This will be a good learning point for future engagement activities, particularly with the need to ensure all community members feel they are given the opportunity to have their say.

Of the feedback contained in the submissions, it should be noted that AlburyCity has reported that it is already undertaking many of the actions which people have raised, including working with Aboriginal groups and consulting with the family of Elke Black around the memorial seat repositioning.

Aboriginal significance:

While this was a smaller issue raised through the feedback, there are concerns the input of Aboriginal peoples has not been sought in the development of the proposal. Throughout the submissions, it was raised that Aboriginal people have strong links with the Eastern Hill area and this must be carefully considered in any plans to develop the area. Engagement that is specific to this group will be productive for both Aboriginal community members and AlburyCity, helping to guide the latter on the cultural considerations which need to be made.

Memorial seat:

The memorial seat which is located at Eastern Hill in memory of Elke Black will be another consideration for AlburyCity in the development of the plans. Several family and friends of the late Albury woman have implored AlburyCity to maintain the seat, if not in its current location, within the Eastern Hill precinct. This has also raised

media attention and will need careful consultation with the family going forward. AlburyCity has clarified that it will retain the memorial in the project redevelopment.

Walking trail improvements:

The submissions made it clear that Eastern Hill is greatly enjoyed by many as a walking area. While concerns have been raised about mountain bikes and walkers being able to co-exist in the precinct, there is strong support for the trails being improved for walkers. Many spoke about walking in and around the Eastern Hill area being a daily routine, while others offered that the current trails were not up to standard and well overdue for improvement.

Revegetation and habitat restoration activities:

A major part of the feedback was around concerns for the natural environment on Eastern Hill. This was categorised as impact on flora, fauna and the environment. Many spoke about how they had experienced some close interactions with animals in the area and felt concerns about how they would be impacted by the area becoming more developed. Others talked about the biodiversity of Eastern Hill and need to be mindful about maintaining its integrity. Any development of any nature will need to be carefully managed to ensure impact on the natural surrounds is minimised. Strong community support for regeneration of the area is shown in submissions.

Proposed mountain bike trails:

As mentioned above, this is the most divisive part of the proposed plans. In general, mountain bikers feel that both they and broader community will benefit from the construction of mountain bike trails. However, for other sectors of the community, the concern ranges from the loss of amenity this would bring other users, the safety concerns particularly to walkers and the environmental impacts. It was raised on many occasions that mountain bikers already had a facility in Albury at Nail Can Hill and that Eastern Hill should not be negatively impacted by introducing trails to this natural environment.

Water tank precinct:

Many of the submissions could see the potential for the water tank precinct and how the enhancement of these would be beneficial. Revegetation around the area was also suggested. In terms of opportunities, some submissions spoke about their wish to see the water tanks artistically treated to activate the area. It was also felt that there was tourism potential for this, similar the silo art which has become prominent in many towns.

Trig Point lookout:

Increasing access to the Trig Point area was well supported by many, with some strongly in support of the boardwalk and viewing platform propose for the area.

Others felt that suggested improvements were over the top and lower scale plans would suffice.

Rotary Lookout:

Improvements to the Rotary Lookout, particularly from its current state and low appeal to the public, were generally welcomed. Many felt it is a greatly under-utilised asset for the community and visitors. There were some concerns that the consultation around this project had centred largely on Rotary. The ongoing involvement of Rotary in the lookout and seeking its feedback on any improvement works will be essential going forward. Car parking around the site was generally welcomed. There were concerns that that lookout would need to be complementary with the natural surrounds. Broadly speaking, this is one of the more well-supported parts of the plan.

Traffic management:

This was an evenly weighted area, where some people felt traffic slowing mitigation measures would add to the amenity of the area, while others felt that increased traffic and vehicle movements would pose a safety risk.

Conclusion

It is evident that there is strong support both for and against the project.

The most alienating issue of the plans appears to be mountain bikers and the impact they are perceived to have on other users. However, the strong support from the mountain bike community was also apparent in submissions.

People had a wide range of concerns about mountain biking, including safety concerns for walkers in the area to damage to the natural environment. However, it must be strongly noted that there are also many people who are favour of increased activity in the area and whether this is mountain biking or not, the activation of an otherwise under-utilised area has wide community support.

There are also several comments made in the submissions which are not in line with what AlburyCity has projected for the site. These have been repeated in several submissions and AlburyCity will need to address these and correct them in the public forum. Doing this may go some way to leading to greater community understanding of what is being proposed.

In general, those who are familiar with the site and the scope of works being proposed can see significant merit in the improvement of hard infrastructure and the benefits that doing this will bring to residents and visitors.

Again, it must be clarified that this assessment of the submissions could only be based on what was written. While some people may feel they have been wrongly categorised, AlburyCity may choose to provide opportunities for people to further clarify the nature and meaning of their submission. Doing so will also add a greater depth to the consultation process.

