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Boolaroo Main Road Heritage Interpretation Plan Community consultation outcomes report

Lake Macquarie City Council (Council) is creating a Heritage Interpretation Plan (HIP) for the historic precinct of Boolaroo (Main Road) to preserve its unique heritage and celebrate its cultural values. For this purpose, Artefact Heritage and Environment (Artefact) has been engaged by Council to conduct community consultation and prepare the HIP.

Artefact and Council undertook in-person and online community consultation with key stakeholders and the broader Lake Macquarie community to gather input and feedback on the precinct's future vision and identify its historic heritage and Aboriginal cultural values and possible interpretation opportunities along Main Road and beyond. The outcomes from this consultation are summarised in this report and will inform the HIP for Boolaroo.



Boolaroo Co-operative Society Ltd., staff and customers 1924 (Source: Lake Mac History)

Summary

Council and Artefact hosted two dedicated consultation sessions in addition to an online survey.

Walk on Country

A Walk on Country was hosted on 22 May 2024 by Biraban Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) with local Elders to learn about the Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the site to inform the planning of appropriate interpretive media.

Interpretation opportunities workshop

On the same day, an interpretation opportunities workshop was hosted by Council and Artefact for Boolaroo key stakeholders, including residents and business owners, to develop a set of key values and draft vision for Boolaroo and to seek input into key interpretation opportunities for Main Road.

Online survey

Following the in-person consultation, Council sought input from the wider community on the key values, draft vision and interpretation opportunities developed during the workshop. An online survey was conducted on Council's Shape Lake Mac platform from 12 June – 9 July 2024, receiving responses from 92 participants.

Consultation outcomes

Walk on Country: Opportunities for Aboriginal heritage interpretation at Boolaroo

During the Walk on Country on 22 May 2024, Aboriginal stakeholders identified several Aboriginal cultural values and stories connected to the area and discussed opportunities to meaningfully integrate these into the heritage interpretation approach for Boolaroo.

It is important to note that when planning and designing interpretive media including Aboriginal cultural heritage values and stories for Boolaroo, consultation with stakeholders must be undertaken throughout the process to ensure that interpretation is appropriate, engaging and relevant for the site itself and those who will use it. As the traditional owners of the land, the local community maintains a dynamic connection to Country which informs their identity, culture, language and ways of living.



View across Albert Reserve to Main Road, Boolaroo, and Mt. Sugarloaf beyond (Source: Artefact 2024)

Opportunities identified during the Walk on Country for interpretive media exploring the Aboriginal cultural values of Boolaroo and the wider area included:

- The involvement of local Aboriginal artists and children in the interpretation of Boolaroo is important. This could take the form of a public artwork created by local Aboriginal artists in collaboration with Aboriginal children from the local public school.
- Connection to place underscores everything and should be considered in interpretive approaches.
- The use of language and highlighting endemic flora and fauna for interpretation purposes would be welcomed.

- Plantings of endemic species along the roadside, such as Gynea lily, rather than small planter boxes, and inclusion of larger gardens or strips for plantings is a preference.
- Create a yarning circle at Albert Reserve for people to gather and meet.
- Create a mural artwork by an Aboriginal artist
- Lead people along Main Road through interpretative means to different points of interest such as Speers Point, Cockle Creek and Munibung Hill.
- Create a storytelling video with the Aboriginal community. This would be great way for Aboriginal voices to be heard.
- Opportunities for the local primary school: learn to use local language, speak to Country and interpret the landscape.

Interpretation opportunities workshop

In collaboration with City Council, Artefact conducted a community workshop on 22 May 2024 with 20 participants who were mostly new and long-term residents and business owners. The workshop aimed to engage key stakeholders in a discussion about the heritage significance and values of Boolaroo. Attendees explored notable buildings and sites, identified potential threats and opportunities, and established four key values for the area. They also collaboratively envisioned a future for Boolaroo, discussed interpretive themes and stories, and considered suitable locations for interpretive elements within the precinct. The outcomes are summarised in the following section.



*Interpretation opportunities workshop with community stakeholders on 22 May 2024
(Source: Lake Macquarie City Council 2024)*

Key Values

Four key values for Boolaroo were distilled by workshop participants:

- Community: The village feel
- The unique heritage of Boolaroo: People, places and stories
- A connected and walkable precinct
- The businesses of Boolaroo: Convenient access to services

Potential threats and challenges for Boolaroo

Workshop participants discussed potential threats and future challenges for the Boolaroo precinct. The four key threats and challenges identified during the workshop were:

- Overdevelopment
- Traffic and lack of safe pedestrian access
- Lack of adequate maintenance for Council-owned assets and recreational areas
- Potential threat of losing essential services

Opportunities

The following opportunities were raised to improve Boolaroo precinct:

- Improve the green and recreational spaces such as Albert Reserve and Kenny Park
- Improve the streetscape of Main Road through plantings and seating
- Maintain and restore historic building facades along Main Road
- Improve active transport links to Cockle Creek
- Main Road activations including fairs and events
- Highlight historical buildings along Main Road through interpretation
- Improve pedestrian safety along Main Road

Improvement priorities

When asked about improvement priorities for the Boolaroo precinct, workshop participants raised the following:

- Main Road streetscape improvements including footpaths, seating and landscaping
- Maintain and improve parks and recreational areas
- Maintenance and restoration of historic buildings along Main Road including shop awnings
- Maintain key services for Boolaroo

Draft vision

During the community workshop participants collaboratively developed a draft vision for the Boolaroo precinct:

Boolaroo: A community that values and preserves our distinct heritage, honouring our buildings, places, people and their stories, now and into the future.

Significant places

Workshop participants discussed places of special importance for Boolaroo, both built and natural. The buildings and places that were highlighted as significant and characteristic for the Boolaroo precinct included:

- Lake Cinema
- The Commercial Hotel
- The former post office
- Boolaroo Sports Club
- Albert Reserve
- Kenny Park
- The churches
- Former motor garage (now Lakeside Tyres and Auto)
- Spar Building (The former Boolaroo Co-operative Society)
- Boolaroo Public School
- Cockle Creek

Interpretation opportunities

Workshop participants discussed interpretation opportunities including interpretive methods and media to communicate historic heritage values of Boolaroo. Suggestions included:

- Interpretive signage along Main Road highlighting key historical buildings and the businesses and people that occupied them.
- Oral-histories project with long-term residents of the area.
- Interpretation integrated into placemaking and functional elements to improve streetscape such as street furniture, planter boxes and bus shelters.
- Interpretation in ground plane elements such as paving, bricks and inlays using names of business and personalities connected to Boolaroo.
- Highlight connections to key places such as Cockle Creek, Munibung Hill, former Pasminco Smelter and Speers Point. This could be achieved

through active transport links, online self-guided heritage trails and improved wayfinding.

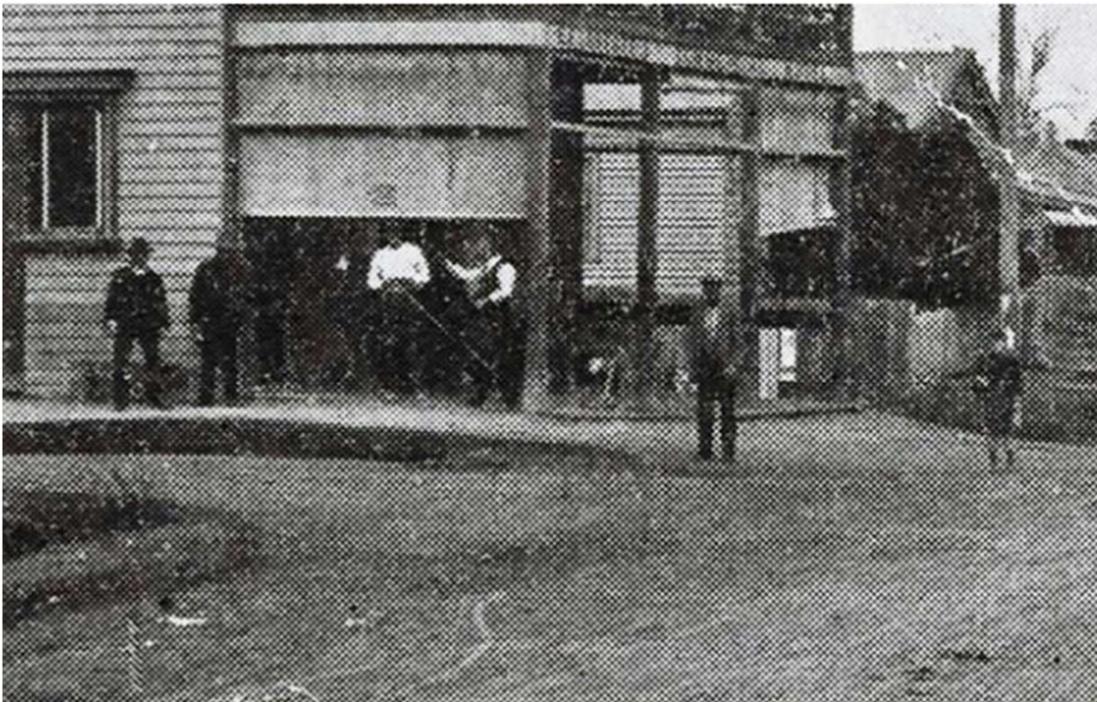
- Public artwork along the Main Road.
- Improve public reserves and create meeting places.



Example images of interpretive panels and public art in placemaking. Left - Good Street Granville, (Source: Artefact, 2024. Photo: Simon Wood Photography). Right - Hannay Lane revitalisation project. (Source: City of Busselton)

Online survey

After the in-person consultation, Council sought broader community input on the key values, draft vision, opportunities, threats, and improvement priorities for the Boolaroo Precinct, developed during the workshop. An online survey was conducted on Council's Shape Lake Mac platform from 12 June – 9 July 2024 attracting responses from 92 participants.

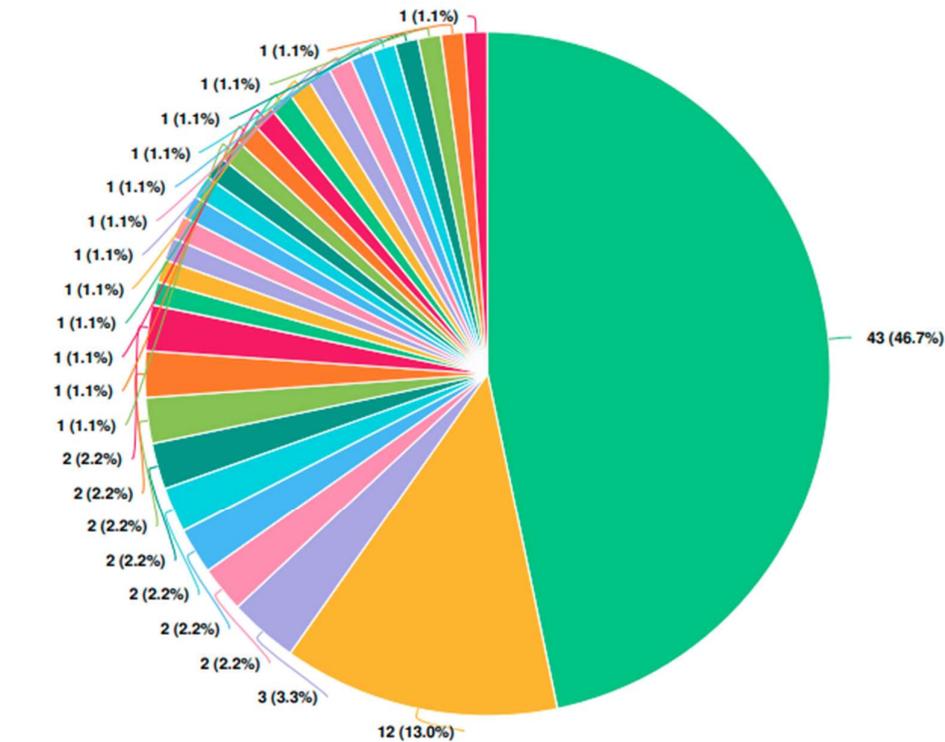


The survey provided participants with the opportunity to express their support or opposition for the above-mentioned elements. Additionally, participants could suggest ideas for interpretive storylines and identify key buildings and places for potential interpretive opportunities. The following sections outlines the survey results.

Demographics

Place of residence

Of the survey respondents, most were based in Boolaroo (46.7 per cent), followed by Speers Point (13 per cent) and Macquarie Hills (3.3 per cent). The remainder of survey respondents were more broadly located across the Lake Macquarie local government area, other areas of NSW and Queensland.

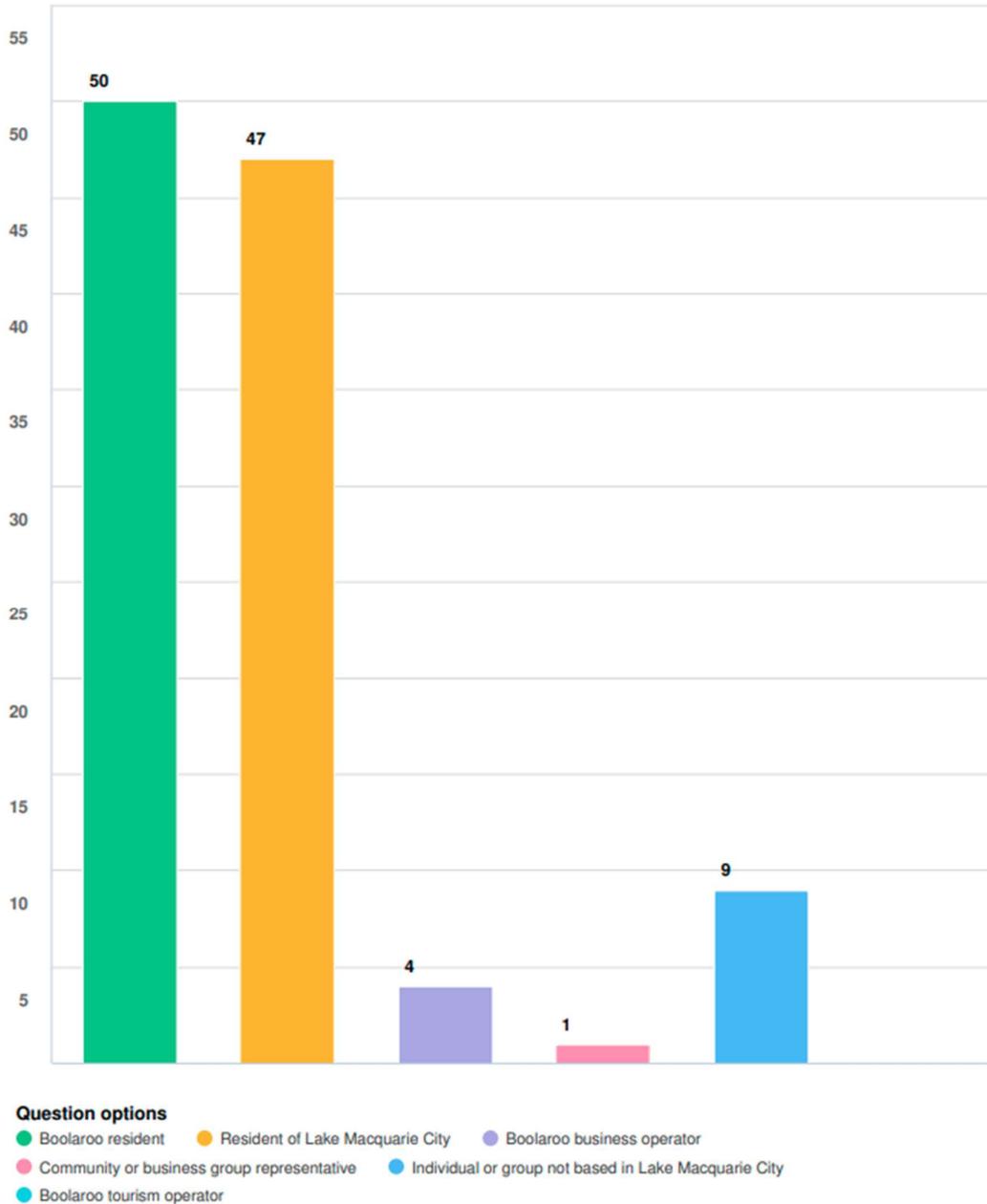


Question options

- BOOLAROO, NSW
- SPEERS POINT, NSW
- MACQUARIE HILLS, NSW
- BOLTON POINT, NSW
- WARNERS BAY, NSW
- MARMONG POINT, NSW
- BELMONT NORTH, NSW
- LAKELANDS, NSW
- WALLSEND, NSW
- ARGENTON, NSW
- CHARLESTOWN, NSW
- GARDEN SUBURB, NSW
- WOLLONGONG, NSW
- TENTERFIELD, NSW
- ELEEBA, NSW
- TORONTO, NSW
- RATHMINES, NSW
- PENRITH, NSW
- CARDIFF, NSW
- ABERMAIN, NSW
- ADAMSTOWN, NSW
- BARNESLEY, NSW
- BLACKALLS PARK, NSW
- BRIGHTWATERS, NSW
- TEWANTIN, QLD
- TERALBA, NSW
- GLENDALE, NSW
- BELMONT, NSW
- WANGI WANGI, NSW
- NEW LAMBTON HEIGHTS, NSW

Representation

50 respondents were residents of Boolaroo and 47 were based in the wider Lake Macquarie area. Nine were individuals or groups not based in Lake Macquarie City, four represented Boolaroo business operators, and one person was a community or business group representative.

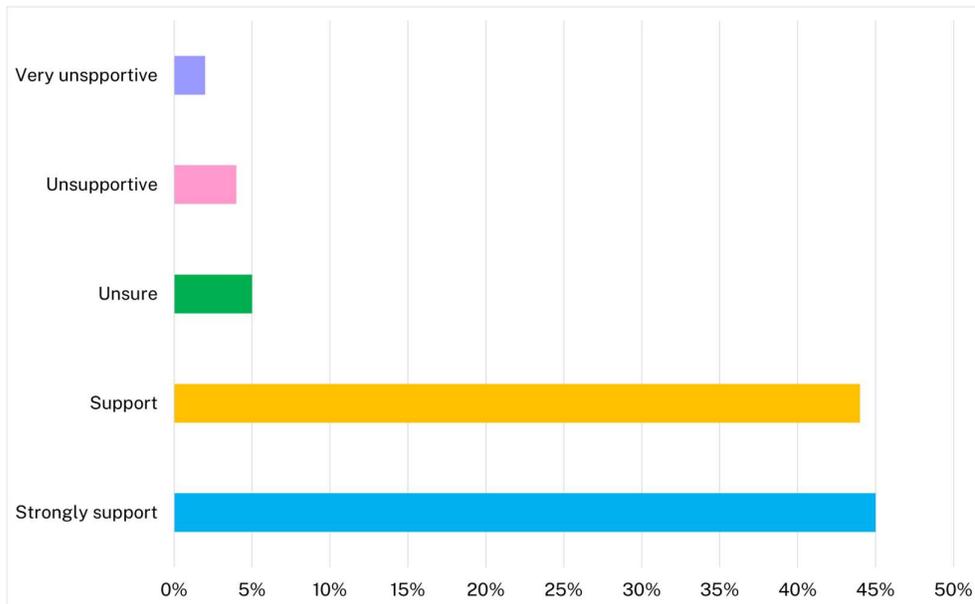




Level of support for key values and draft vision for Boolaroo

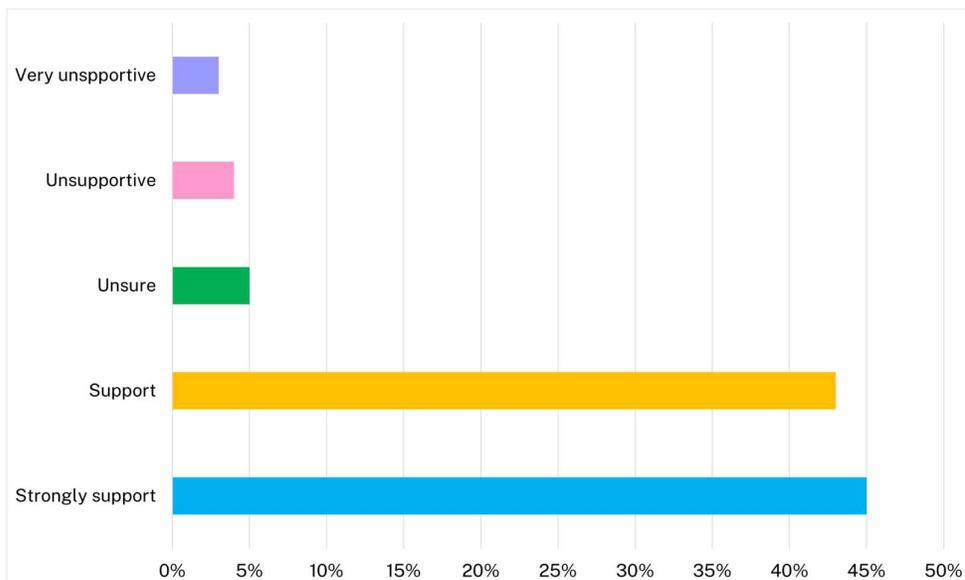
Community: The village feel

The majority of survey participants either strongly supported (45 per cent) or supported (44 per cent) this value. Five per cent were unsure, while four per cent were unsupportive, and two per cent were very unsupportive.



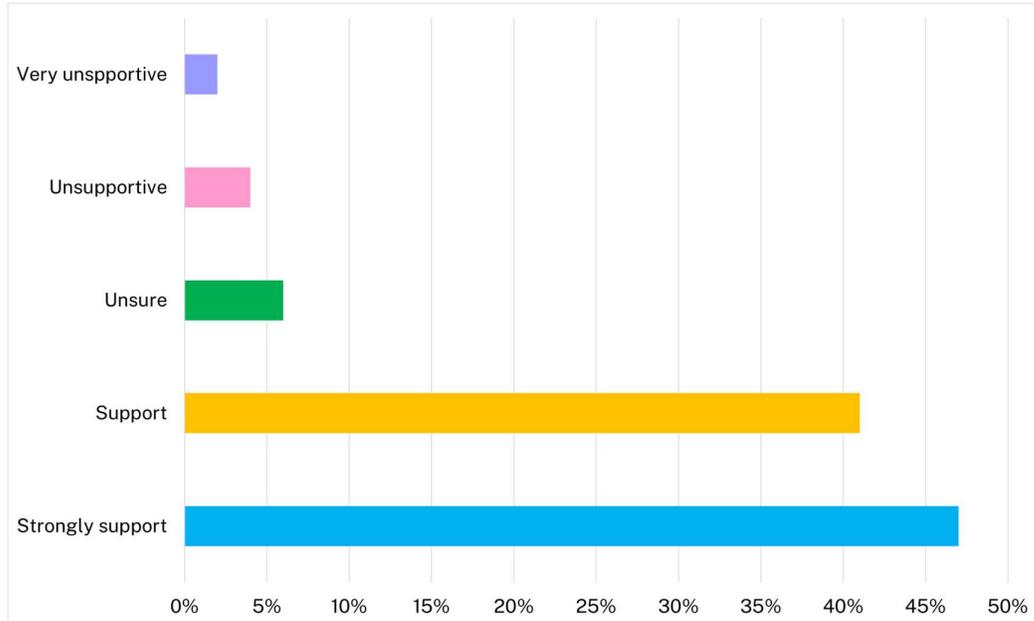
The unique heritage of Boolaroo: People, places and stories

Most survey participants either strongly supported (45 per cent) or supported (43 per cent) this value. Meanwhile, five per cent were unsure, four per cent were unsupportive, and three per cent were very unsupportive.



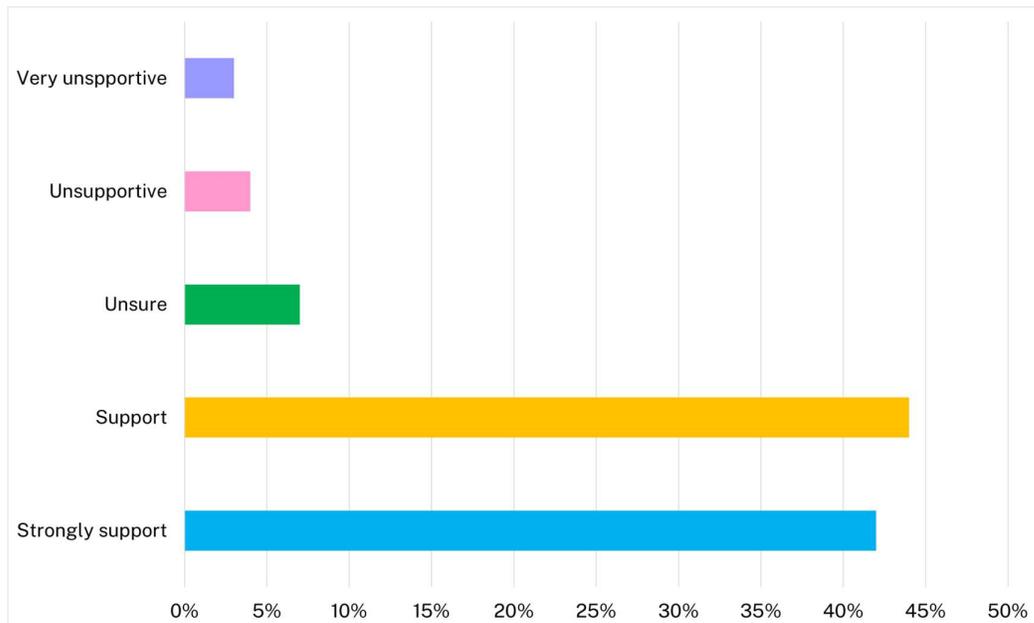
A connected and walkable precinct

There was strong support by 47 per cent and support by 41 per cent of participants for this value. Six per cent were unsure, four per cent were unsupportive and two per cent very unsupportive of this value.



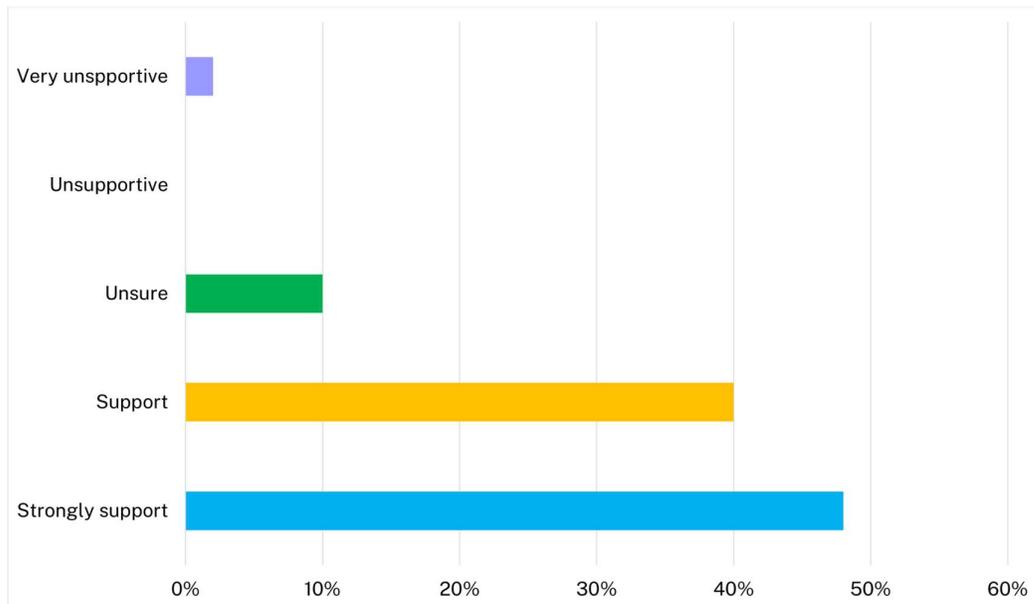
The businesses of Boolaroo: Convenient access to services

42 per cent of participants were very supportive and 44 per cent supportive of this value. Seven per cent were unsure, four per cent were unsupportive and three per cent very unsupportive of this value.



Draft vision

Most survey participants (48 per cent) were very strongly supportive of the draft vision for Boolaroo Precinct. This was followed by 40 per cent being supportive of the draft vision, nine per cent being unsure, nil being unresponsive and two per cent being strongly unresponsive.



Key places of Boolaroo

Are there any other places and/or buildings within Boolaroo that you think are important?

Survey respondents provided several additional suggestions for buildings and places to consider for the Heritage Interpretation Plan. Not all are within the precinct boundary but some represented connector points to and from the precinct and Main Road. They included:

- Access points to Munibung Hill
- The row of heritage shops at the Boolaroo Public School crossing
- Former Westlakes Advertiser building on Main Road
- Location of former Watkins Bridge
- Former Sulphide Corporation
- Boolaroo and Teralba District ambulance transport station
- Former Boolaroo Police Station
- Hawkins building
- Headmaster's residence for Boolaroo Public School

- The former T.C. Frith building
- George Rinker's barber shop
- Pasmenco office building
- Munibung lookout
- Virtue's Garage
- Motorbike shop
- Hippy Java building
- The Sulphide Hotel (Shinnies)
- Lance Needs Butchery
- The five islands and bridges that used to connect to the west side of the lake
- Connection to Speers Point Park
- Former tramline that used to connect Boolaroo to Newcastle
- Catholic Church
- Church of England
- Boolaroo Bowling Club



Left - Steam tram at First Street, Boolaroo. Right - T.C Frith store front

Challenges and potential threats to Boolaroo

Are there any additional challenges and potential threats to Boolaroo that should be considered?

Survey respondents identified additional potential threats and challenges to those identified during the community workshop. They included:

- Traffic on the Main Road
- Lack of adequate maintenance for Council-owned assets and recreational areas.

- Lack of safe entry and exit points to the cycleway (e.g., at Bunnings and seventh Street).
- Insufficient pedestrian crossing.
- Deterioration and decay due to underdevelopment.
- Inadequate footpaths and building gutters.
- Threat of new buildings being used only for office spaces, not for businesses.
- Dangerous entry and exit to Spar as pedestrians are not using nearby pedestrian crossing.
- Tobacco shops.
- Insufficient parking.
- Lead in soil.
- Essential services and businesses closing.
- Loss of emergency services.
- Poor road maintenance.
- Insufficient pedestrian crossings.
- Increased through traffic due to new development.
- Rising crime and anti-social behaviour (vandalism, graffiti, hooning, theft).
- Poor street drainage.
- Overdevelopment.
- Lack of acknowledgment of historical relevance of sites/buildings could result in their destruction or demolition.
- Lack of plans to upgrade Cockle Creek train station.
- Lack of greenery along Main Road.
- Need to consider the capacity of Boolaroo Public School due to new residential development.
- Demolition of mid-1900s houses threatens the character of Boolaroo Heritage Precinct.
- Loss of village ambiance.
- Overdevelopment is threatening the character and village feel of Boolaroo.

Are there additional opportunities for Boolaroo that should be considered?

A number of survey respondents provided suggestions for additional opportunities for Boolaroo. They included:

- Highlight historical buildings along Main Road through interpretation.

- Improve green and recreational spaces such as Albert Reserve and Kenny Park.
- Provide grants to historic building owners to restore facades and awnings.
- Improve access to public transport and support facilities.
- Establish a museum for local heritage items.
- Install speed humps on Main Road.
- Improve pedestrian access across TC Frith Avenue for bicycle paths, parks and train station.
- Improve pedestrian access across Munibung Road for access to the commercial estate via bikes and walking.
- Utilise empty bush area between Cockle Creek Train Station and TC Frith Avenue (possibly a skate park).
- Install raised pedestrian crossings at the school.
- Create links to Speers Point Park to encourage visitors to move up Main Road.
- Implement traffic management during peak hours.
- Improve street lighting and install CCTV cameras for increased security.
- Include parks and playgrounds in new residential developments.
- Install roundabouts near Bunnings.
- Improve general street plantings.
- Improve pedestrian access to Cockle Creek.
- Stop building high rises on Main Street.
- Install traffic lights.
- Widen Main Road.
- Construct more footpaths.
- Protect existing historical buildings along Main Road.
- Create a stronger food scene.
- Provide opportunities for local businesses to promote themselves.
- Offer interpretive information on panels in Main Road.
- Encourage restaurants on Main Road to open for dinner.
- Realise public transport from the proposed Glendale interchange, such as light rail or more bus routes.
- Encourage more cafes and restaurants along Main Road.
- Establish a dedicated community centre with public toilets, a room for hire, and an information station for activities like kids' holiday activities and local group meetings.

- Create a Men's Shed.
- Develop a community garden.
- Recognise the Sulphide Corporation's significant role in Boolaroo's history.
- Discourage the use of Main Road as a thoroughfare for non-residents by reducing the speed limit and adding traffic control measures.
- Improve safety at night by updating street lighting.
- Install bus shelters at all designated bus stops.
- Ensure accessibility for those living with disabilities.

Stories about Boolaroo and individuals connected to the area who should be shared and celebrated

Many survey participants shared stories and historical information about Boolaroo, and emphasised the value of speaking with long-term residents who hold invaluable local knowledge. A selection of stories, historical figures and themes suggested for interpretation by survey participants is listed in the following section together with selected quotes:

People's stories

- Mr. Albert Hawkins, entrepreneur and community benefactor
- Mr Lance Needs, the butcher
- Mr McEnerney, Boolaroo Public School principal
- The many stories of the Sulphite Corporation workers
- The business owners and civic service providers along the Main Road of Boolaroo

"It would be good to tell stories of people who used key buildings (e.g. butchers, police officers and any ongoing connections to the area through their families)."

- Cressy Family
- Alan Craig
- George Rinker, the barber
- Oral histories: Share the stories of long-term Boolaroo residents

"You will find that if you speak to any of the older folk in the neighbourhood, they are most likely second or third generation Boolaroo residents and can share a lot of stories about Boolaroo."

- Bob Mason, operator of Lakeside Theatre
- Gundy Roberts, Newsagency

- The Frith Family
- The Mitchel family

"As a young boy, I used to help run the cattle of the Hawkins Hill. Also used to help my godmother wash the Boral trucks when it at the top of Third Street."

Places

- Tell the stories about the Sulphite Corporation and Pasmico Smelter
- The social hubs of Boolaroo: The Commercial and Sulphite Hotel, the Lake Cinema and public halls, the Boolaroo Bowling and Sports Club
- Share stories and information about important local landmarks such as Cockle Creek, Munibung Hill and Speers Point

Next steps

The outcomes from community consultation will inform the Heritage Interpretation Plan and its recommendations for interpretive opportunities along Main Road. It is anticipated that the Heritage Interpretation Plan will be finalised by the end of 2024.

For more information and project updates, please visit:

<https://shape.lakemac.com.au/boolaroo-hip>