

# Notes from the Protecting the Vibe public meeting

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On Wednesday 15 March 2017 the Protecting the Vibe public meeting was co-hosted by the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre and Greens Member for Newtown Jenny Leong MP.

It followed on from a 2015 public meeting on the Newtown Vibe, called in response to community concerns around the Sydney lockouts and community safety, and gave the community the opportunity to hear about the work of the Newtown Vibe Roundtable, established after the initial public meeting, and to report in on the current vibe in Newtown.

Around 70 community members attended the meeting.

## Protecting the Vibe meeting participants:

- Liz Yeo, CEO Newtown Neighbourhood Centre
- Jenny Leong MP, Greens Member for Newtown
- Richard Adamson, Newtown Business Precinct Association, Newtown Liquor Accord, Young Henrys Founder and Director
- Councillor Jess Miller, City of Sydney, Clover Moore Independent Team
- Lyn Milne, Social Policy and Planning Advisor, Inner West Council
- Sarah Lambert, Director Community Health and Regional Services, ACON
- Inspector Glenn Aston, Newtown Local Area Command

Also in attendance were City of Sydney Councillors Linda Scott (ALP) and Jess Scully (Clover Moore Independent Team)

## Intro from Liz Yeo, MC and CEO of the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

At the start of the meeting community members were asked how many had attended the public meeting in 2015. Only a handful indicated that they were there.

## Report from Jenny Leong:

Jenny noted that it has been 18 months since the initial public meeting and that things had changed in that time. The Roundtable was a positive response to the concerns raised by the community that gave local stakeholders the opportunity to work together. Although there had been an increase in visitor numbers to Newtown, reported assaults had remained relatively stable, however there have been anecdotal reports of a change in mood on the streets.

## **Report on the Roundtable from Liz Yeo and Richard Adamson, Newtown Liquor Accord and Newtown Business Precinct Association:**

Liz and Richard reported back on the work of the Roundtable and the initiatives that had come out of it.

A full report on the roundtable is available at [jennyleong.org/roundtable\\_report](http://jennyleong.org/roundtable_report)

Or at [newtowncentre.org/newtown-vibe1.html](http://newtowncentre.org/newtown-vibe1.html)

### **Discussion:**

The floor was opened to community members to make comments and ask questions of the Roundtable members who were participating at the meeting.

- Liz Yeo, CEO Newtown Neighbourhood Centre
- Jenny Leong MP, Greens Member for Newtown
- Richard Adamson, Newtown Business Precinct Association, Newtown Liquor Accord, Young Henrys Founder and Director
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These are the range of issues that came from people on the floor.

### **Areas of concerns:**

- Housing affordability: a number of people spoke about the high costs of housing and the desire to keep a diversity of residents in the local area.
- WestConnex: there were general concerns about traffic and construction, as well as a very specific fear that a clearway along King St would be devastating for local businesses and the local community. There were also concerns that information is always changing and it's hard to know what the latest is.
- Reporting incidents to police: one person indicated that they had had a bad experience when making a report to police about an assault. There was also concern that the survey indicated that many incidents were not being reported, with a need to look into why that was happening.
- Safety on the streets: there were concerns about the increased number of people on the streets late at night and on weekends. Some aggressive/intimidating behaviour was reported.

- Safety at venues: most comments indicated that venues were managing increased visitor numbers, staff/security behaviour and safety well. However one person felt that the bigger venues were doing a good job but at a small number of venues there were issues with the behaviour of both patrons and staff.
- Homophobia: there was concern that this still exists in Newtown
- Public Transport: public transport is already struggling to cope with demand. With the projected increase in residents, the current networks won't be able to cope. We want confirmation that St Peters and Erskineville stations will stay open while the Sydney Metro is built.
- Development: on-going development at Sydney Uni and other surrounding areas was raised as a concern.
- Keeping Newtown diverse, warm and welcoming: a number of people expressed that they loved Newtown and still felt it was diverse, safe and welcoming. People emphasised that they wanted venues to stay open and the streets to be full. They wanted Newtown to keep its character but not to "close the borders" to people who wanted to visit.
- Live music venues: there was some concern about the closure of Newtown Social Club and the alternative venue proposed (potential loss of another music venue)

#### Suggestions and ideas:

- Newtown could set up a program similar to the Take Kare program in Sydney city
- Queer-friendly police should be available
- Data could be gathered through regular surveys, particularly to get solid data on any under-reporting of harassment/intimidation, and on general community perceptions of safety.
- Welcome visitors with colourful flags and signs to show them what Newtown is all about
- Create pop up spaces for arts and creative practices, similar to what happened in Newcastle
- Give people a place to go when they are refused entry to venues for being too drunk eg more late night eateries
- Roundtable could set objectives around some of the concrete concerns like development, affordability and safety.
- Locals can join WestConnex resident action groups to oppose a clearway on King St and other elements of WestConnex

#### Feedback:

- Active streets deter crime, Newtown may be kept safer by having people around. Maybe the stats around assaults indicate that we're actually doing something right.
- Newtown is fantastic, an eclectic mix of people who all get on.
- I love the local area and want my 1 year old son to see the things I love about it.

- Concerns that were raised at the 2015 meeting around violence in Newtown are no longer a big concern.
- Congratulations to the Roundtable

## Responses from the Panel:

### Safety concerns:

- Newtown police clarified that non-domestic assaults in Newtown since the lockouts have remained relatively stable. This is positive, particularly considering the large increase in visitor numbers. The recent BOCSAR stats that were released lumped Newtown in with Bondi, Coogee and Double Bay, which misleadingly indicated a notable rise in non-domestic assaults in Newtown. In fact, the increase was across the suburbs as a group. Looking at the figures for just the suburb of Newtown, there was an average of 12.5 non-domestic assaults each month before the lockouts and post the lockouts the average is 13.3 non-domestic assaults each month.
- Although the number of assaults has remained stable, there are still genuine concerns around low-level harassment, verbal abuse, intimidation and other bad behaviour on the streets, particularly late at night.
- It's essential that we follow up on possible under-reporting of harassment/intimidation, indicated by the community survey.
- ACON runs programs around LGBTIQ safety like Rovers. They can also assist LGBTIQ people who need to [report an incident to police](#).
- There are 22 'safe place' locations around Newtown, part of the [ACON LGBTI Safe Places network](#). [Map here](#). Newtown should remain a welcoming place for LGBTIQ visitors as well as residents.
- NSW Police have a Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer program. Newtown LAC have GLLO officers and community members can ask for them to report an incident. They may not always be on shift but can be called in at any time for serious matters.
- Stats and anecdotal evidence show that venues have been managing increased visitor numbers without an increase in incidents. However the concerns about behaviour on the street need to be addressed. This is the next challenge for the community and the Roundtable will be looking at ways to address this. The transition of people between venues and home is a key issue. There are 'refusal to quit' measures that allow police to take action when people are refused entry to venues then refuse to move on, however we should look for ways to deal with the issue before the police are involved.
- The Newtown Precinct Business Association will look into data collection/surveying opportunities.
- The Newtown Precinct Business Association has a meeting with Take Kare next week.
- The best community safety initiatives come from the community. Organisations and community groups can apply for grants from the City of Sydney or Inner West Council.

Different types of grants have different application windows, so contact the councils directly if you have questions or ideas. More information:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/grants-and-sponsorships>

<http://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/council/grants>

- The City of Sydney is looking at entertainment offerings throughout the LGA. With a big influx of new residents at places like Green Square, we will need more entertainment options.

#### WestConnex:

- Regular updates come from resident groups like the [WestConnex Action Group](#), [No WestConnex: Public Transport not Motorways](#) and [Newtown Residents Against WestConnex](#). Jenny Leong also sends out regular updates – you can sign up at [stopwestconnex.org.au](http://stopwestconnex.org.au)
- The Newtown Precinct Business Association is looking at how WestConnex will impact local businesses and opposes a clearway.

#### Affordable housing:

- The Inner West Council has developed an [affordable housing policy](#).
- The City of Sydney has an [affordable rental housing strategy](#) and is looking at different initiatives to encourage the development of affordable housing.
- A review of the Residential Tenancies Act is underway and there's an opportunity to put in place protections for renters. Jenny Leong is pushing for this.
- Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is involved in the review of the Residential Tenancies Act, and is also running an affordable housing campaign to request that the Greater Sydney Commission increase the current targets for affordable housing in their draft district plans

#### Development:

- Jenny Leong's office has just been made aware of the proposed development at the Sydney Uni regiment building. Jenny will look into it further and any concerned residents should get in touch.

#### Late night businesses and live music:

- City of Sydney is developing strategies to encourage a mix of late night businesses
- The loss of any live music venue in Sydney is a big concern. The Newtown Precinct Business Association will reach out to the new owners at the Newtown Social Club, but the owners will make the decision as to what the venue will become.

#### Transport:

- Concerns will be discussed by the Newtown Precinct Business Association

## Wrap up and next steps from Liz Yeo:

Liz noted the main themes and suggestions discussed through the meeting.

- The community sees value in the Roundtable continuing to meet
- There are some existing programs around community safety that can be investigated for possible use in Newtown
- It could be useful for the Roundtable to have objectives
- Concerns around an underreporting of incidents to police needs further investigation and data gathering. GLLOs and ACON should be involved in further discussions.
- The Roundtable can look at what additional concrete things can be done around issues like safety and diversity
- If the Roundtable is to continue, there needs to be discussion around how it can be resourced

To find out more about the work of the Roundtable to date you can read the report at  
[jennyleong.org/roundtable\\_report](http://jennyleong.org/roundtable_report)

Or at [newtowncentre.org/newtown-vibe1.html](http://newtowncentre.org/newtown-vibe1.html)

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