



**CITY OF
PARRAMATTA**

Future Use of the 6 Valentine Avenue Substation

Phase One Engagement Summary Report
August 2020



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CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction3
- 2. Engagement Methodology and Objectives6
- 3. Summary of Engagement Feedback7
- 4. Next Steps14

1. Introduction

The City of Parramatta (Council) is investigating potential future uses of the former electrical substation located at 6 Valentine Avenue, Parramatta.

Council acquired the substation to allow for proposed road widening works on Valentine Avenue. Valentine Avenue is proposed to be converted to two-way to allow for traffic changes required to implement the broader CBD Southern Precinct Renewal Project. A slip lane has already been constructed to allow for this at the corner of Valentine Avenue and Parkes Street.

The area required to be acquired (as annotated within the *Parramatta Local Environmental Plan 2011*) falls within one lot which includes the former substation, previously owned by an energy company. The substation was surplus to the operational requirements of the company and they agreed to enter into acquisition discussions with the City of Parramatta on the basis that the entire lot, including the substation, was sold. The City of Parramatta Council resolved to acquire the substation at its meeting 9 June 2020.

This report outlines the feedback received by the community during the consultation period which occurred between 20 July and 3 August 2020.

1.1. History of the substation

Based on site-specific historical research undertaken for the site, the subject building is a former electrical substation that is thought to have been constructed on behalf of the former Prospect County Council in the period between 1957 and 1961. The building, known as “Substation No. 835”, continued to operate until 2004 when the building became surplus to the requirements of the energy company responsible for its operation. All electrical equipment and machinery has been removed and the building has essentially been left vacant. No structural changes have been undertaken, therefore retaining the shape and footprint of the original building.

The substation has no listing on State or Local heritage registers.

1.2. Site Analysis

The substation is located at 6 Valentine Avenue, Parramatta, in an area known at the ‘CBD Southern Precinct’. The site is legally described as Lot 1 DP 610127. The site area is 216.6m², with the building itself covering an area of approximately 50m² (with dimensions of 7m by 7.5m).

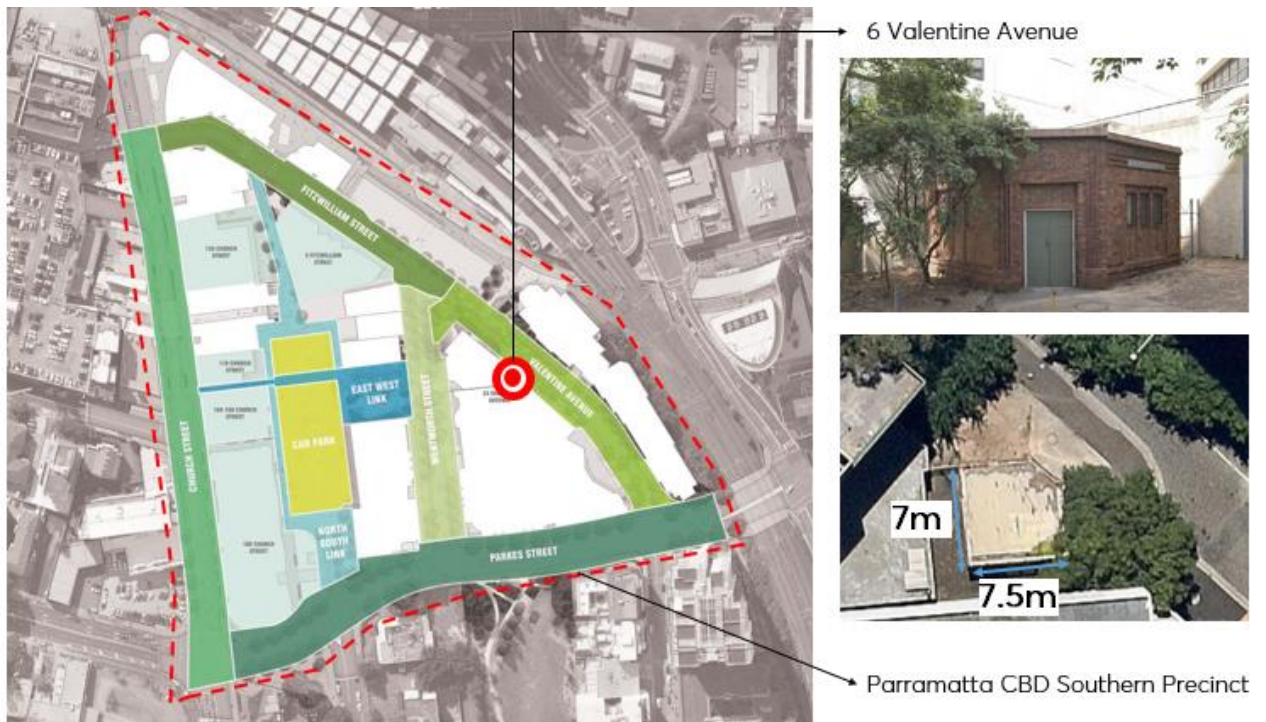


Figure 1 - Location of the 6 Valentine Avenue Substation

The site is located within the B3 Commercial Core which permits a range of uses including business premises, commercial premises, community facilities and tourist and visitor accommodation. The site has a maximum floor space ratio (FSR) of 6.0:1, although if developed in isolation, a maximum FSR of 4.0:1 would apply. There is no maximum building height applying to the site.

The subject building is a small, single storey, face brick Post-War building with decorative brick details. The double brick structure sits on a reinforced concrete slab on ground and occupies a relatively open and flat area. Set back from the Valentine Avenue frontage, the building generally follows the shape of the site however does not intrude beyond the prevailing building line along Valentine Avenue, despite the larger site area extending to the kerb's edge.

The building is generally square in plan with a splayed corner running parallel to the Valentine Avenue boundary. The splay features a pair of timber panelled doors, topped by decorative brick header and flanked by decorative brick pilasters and detailing. The splay bears relief lettering "Sub-Station No. 11" and is capped by the continuous brick parapet capping.

The four main facades of the building sit on a stepped brick base and brick detail that form low level vent holes that allow air flow in the building. Each façade is articulated by centred, recessed bays with three small window openings surrounded by decorative brickwork including panels in herringbone pattern.

The building generally appears in good condition, although some cracking is evident on the main facades, particularly extending from opening heads across to the corners of the building.

The interior of the building comprises of one single space. The interior finishes are bare concrete slab floor, painted brick walls and battened sheet ceiling. The ceiling also features vents at each of the corners and is raked around the edges. All of the electrical equipment has been removed revealing two rectangular floor recesses/wells parallel to the north and east walls.

The site is located near to a recently established bus stop which services the areas impacted by the closed Carlingford Rail Line. The bus stop will be in operation during the construction period to convert the heavy rail line to light rail (due for completion in 2023).

A preliminary and detailed site investigation was undertaken in 2018 and identified fill based soils as present at a shallow depth across the site. The fill contained elevated levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (including benzo[a]pyrene), semi and non-volatile TRH and asbestos which have not been found to pose a potential ecological or health risk. The site is suitable from a contamination/hazmat perspective for commercial/industrial use, which includes cafes and retail. Further investigations may be required if any works are proposed beneath the slab and therefore it is desirable that this does not occur, but may be undertaken on the recommendation of the consultant for a specific future use.

The site has household power and water available. Three phase power, sewer and gas do not appear to be connected to the site.

Images of the site are shown below.



Figure 2 - Images of the Site

2. Engagement Methodology and Objectives

2.1. Objectives of the Project

The objectives of the project to identify a future use of the Valentine Avenue substation are to:

- Contribute positively to the streetscape and the cultural offer of the Parramatta CBD;
- Deliver project ideas prioritised by community consultation;
- Represent value for money for ratepayers;
- Be viable and not unreasonably impact the sustainability of surrounding businesses; and
- Assist in meeting, where possible, various strategies and objectives of Council.

2.2. Objectives of Engagement

The levels of participation for the engagement program (based on the IAP2 Spectrum) were 'Inform' and 'Consult'. The table below outlines the objectives of the program for each engagement level.

Table 1 – Engagement Objectives

Engagement Level	Objectives
Inform	Communicate that City of Parramatta Council is considering options for the future use of the former electrical substation at 6 Valentine Avenue.
Consult	Council would like to gain an understanding of the types of businesses that the audience in and around the substation would likely use to ensure viability of any future tenancy. Council would like to get an understanding of other precedent tenancies which may allude to the character which people would like to see in the area, or provide us with opportunities to invite specific businesses to trial operations within the space. A potential future use will allow Council to determine how much investment should be put into upgrading the asset to make it suitable for use.

2.3. Engagement Methodology

Council hosted an online survey on its “Participate Parramatta” Community Engagement Platform, which was live between the dates of July 20, 2020 and August 3, 2020. 184 surveys were completed. The online survey was also advertised on the following social media pages:

- City of Parramatta Facebook Page (post on 21 July, 2020)
- Participate Parramatta Facebook Page (post on 22 July, 2020)

A Facebook poll was used in the above Facebook posts to which 51 people responded. Of note, the post which was made on the City of Parramatta Facebook Page received 179 comments and had been shared 9 times (as of 4 August, 2020).

Three A0 posters inviting feedback on the survey were placed on the site.

3. Summary of Engagement Feedback

3.1. Likes and Dislikes of the Building

Respondents were asked to describe what they like or dislike about the building. The questions is unprompted and provides an indication of the extent to which the building is generally viewed in a positive or negative light. The question also provides insight into what elements of the building should be celebrated and which elements can be improved.

The responses provided in the survey have been coded by theme and are shown in **Table 2** below.

Table 2 – What do you like or dislike about the building?

Theme	Responses	Comments
Likes (n=142)		
History and heritage	44	Many respondents commented that they like the building because of its heritage and because it represents a different time period which had a stronger value of civic infrastructure. Many respondents encouraged the repurposing of the building.
Architecture	39	Respondents admired many of the architectural features of the building, particularly its brickwork (specifically its herringbone pattern), signage and doors. The art deco or industrial style of the building was referenced as quite a unique addition to the precinct's architecture.
General appearance/character	31	Council received various responses which generally stated that the general look and character of the building is valued. Positive words used to describe the building include 'cool', 'unique', 'funky', 'quirky' and 'charming'.
Size/scale	13	Respondents positively described that the building's small size adds to its charm and quaintness.
Other	9	Some respondents used this open question as an opportunity to suggest future uses, including a café, community hall or toilet facility. Other respondents commented that they like the trees or provided personal stories of how they have always admired the building.
Dislikes (n=20)		
Dated/needs a freshen up	6	A small number of respondents said that they thought the building was dated in a negative way, or requires cleaning/work to make it a nice place.
Dark	4	A small amount of respondents did not like how dark the building is, or its lack of windows.
Other	10	Various comments were received reflecting negatively on the building including that it is 'ugly', has unmaintained landscaping or is too small.

It is clear from this question that the community views this building very positively, with 88% of comments referring to aspects which respondents like and only 12% of comments referring to aspects which are disliked.

The responses from this question also indicate that the community wants this small historic building to be repurposed with retention of its architectural elements such as the brickwork, signage and doors, as these elements contribute to its unique, quirky and charming quality.

3.2. Future Character of the Precinct

The community was asked to complete the following sentence using three words:

“The Parramatta CBD Southern Precinct needs to attract more retail, hospitality or cultural offerings which are...”

The question was unprompted and assists Council in writing a brief to attract a particular style of future tenant or use by designating the desired character. The feedback received during this question will assist in directing many decisions which need to be made regarding the project, such as the primary audience and specific design elements.

The responses provided in the survey have been coded by theme and are shown in **Table 3** below.

Table 3 – The Parramatta CBD Southern Precinct needs to attract more retail, hospitality or cultural offerings which are:

Theme	Words included in theme	Responses
Youth-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hip • Cool • Trendy • Funky • Groovy 	27
Interesting & Entertaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting • Entertaining • Appetising • Fun 	23
Unique & Different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique • Different • Niche • Unusual 	20
Vibrant & Engaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant • Engaging • Lively • Attractive 	19
Accessible & Welcoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible • Welcoming • Inviting to a wide range of people 	18
Community Oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community centred/oriented/focussed • Welfare • Reflective of the community 	16
Cultural & Artistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Cultural offerings • Indigenous culture 	16
Inclusive & Diverse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive • Diverse • Used for all 	12
Quality & Visually Appealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality • Visually appealing • Beautiful 	11
Cafes & Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality 	10

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Café • Bars 	
Progressive & Modern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive • Modern • Aspirational • New age 	9
Independent & Local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent • Authentic • Local 	9
More Nightlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightlife • Open late 	8
History & Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sympathetic to / preserving history • Heritage 	8
Environmentally Sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability • Not harmful to the environment 	7
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More live music • Open • Available • Small • Intimate • Sophisticated • Affordable • Clean • Flexible • Innovative • Safe • Grungy • Alternative • Anti-establishment 	52

The results of this question demonstrate that the community are seeking more businesses and uses which interesting, unique and have a clear point of difference – particularly spaces which cater to youth for which there appears to be a shortfall of available spaces within the Parramatta CBD. There is support from the community for spaces to be as inclusive as possible, supportive of the arts and sustainable.

3.3. Type of Future Use

The community was asked about a suitable future use for the substation in a few different ways.

Firstly, a Facebook poll was posted which allowed respondents to provide a quick response to the question “For what type of use should the City of Parramatta repurpose the former substation at 6 Valentine Avenue?” This replicated the first question in the online survey, which provided different responses as shown in **Table 4**. This question was asked to seek community feedback about whether Council should curate and manage a future use (with appropriate public resources), or whether Council should partner with the private sector for a future enterprising use.





Table 4 – For what type of use should the City of Parramatta repurpose the former substation at 6 Valentine Avenue?

	Facebook Poll (n=51)	Online Survey (n=184)	Combined results (n=235)
Small Business Use	18 (35%)	94 (51%)	112 (48%)
Community Use	33 (65%)	73 (40%)	106 (45%)
Other	Nil (not an option in the poll)	17 (9%)	17 (7%)

The results of this question generally show that the community is split in whether they would like to see a small business use or community use, with a slight (3%) preference for small business use based on overall respondents.

On the City of Parramatta Facebook Page post of July 21, 2020, many people used the comments section to suggest future uses of the substation, with 179 comments received in total. The comments which generated the highest community reaction are shown below in **Table 5**. These comments are relevant as they were provided by respondents unprompted and were responsive to community interaction, providing an indication of the level of community engagement with this project.

Table 5 – Comments with 20 or more reactions from City of Parramatta Facebook Page post of July 21, 2020

Comment (Verbatim)	Reactions	Replies
<i>It's a very small space what about lockers for the homeless with a mobile phone charging station. This way they don't have to leave thier belongings under bridges in corner ps,of property's or carry them around with them. A notice board inside with numbers and referral services</i>	 71	9
<i>A Light Rail track going right through the middle of it would be just fantastic! It'd match perfectly with local businesses in Parramatta that way</i> 🙌🙌🙌🚆	 64	4
<i>Parramatta council should sell it off to a developer and build a mega hi-rise there that could blockout the sun and people could leave their rubbish and mattresses out the front for people that could pick through the rubbish and have snooze. It's not like we have enough.</i> 😞	 33	3
<i>From memory a substation in or around Alexandria was turned into a great cafe. Worth checking out to see if it's still there.</i>	 24	6

Within the survey, respondents were asked to rate the extent that they would personally use suggested future uses of the substation on a spectrum from 'definitely yes' to 'absolutely not'. The project ideas which were prompted by Council due to their feasible implementation the responses are shown below in **Figure 3**.

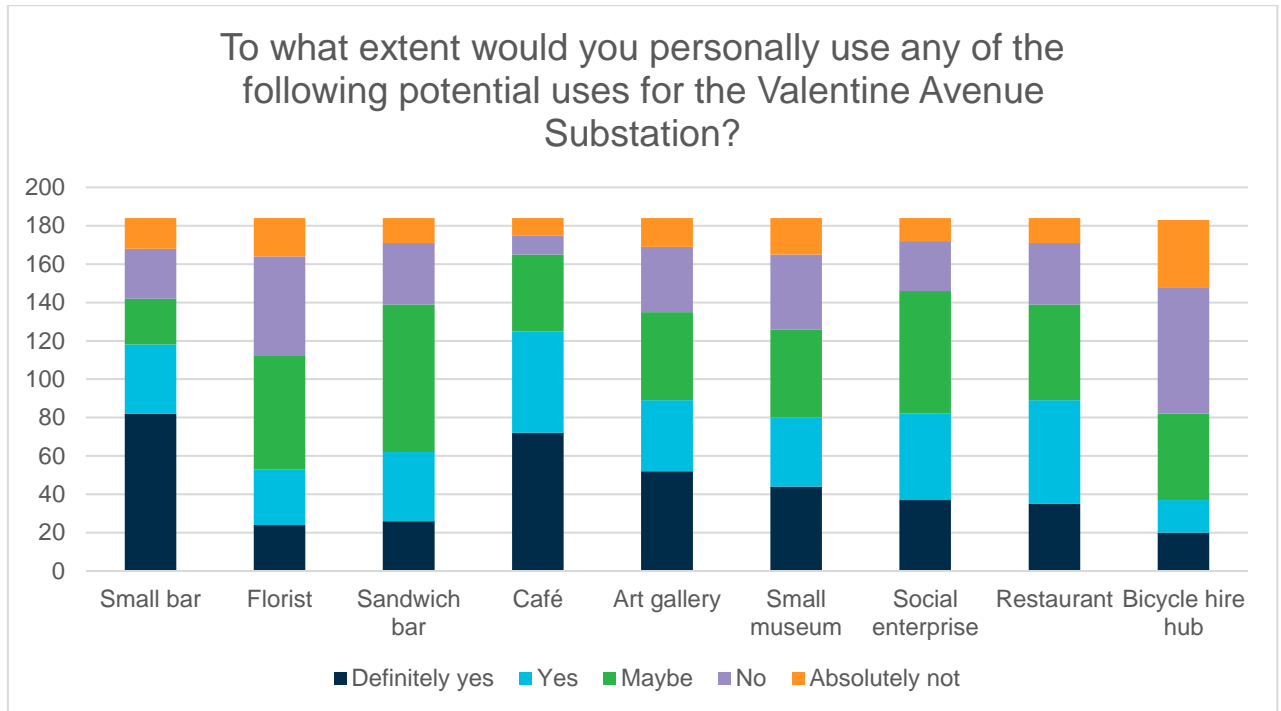


Figure 3 - Extent that respondents would personally use suggested future uses

Out of the options listed, the results indicate that a small bar or café use would be most used by those who completed the survey.

Respondents were further asked to provide any businesses, projects or potential uses which they are aware of which may be suited to the site. This was an unprompted question and received diverse responses. Responses have been categorised by use, with uses receiving three or more responses shown below in **Table 6**.

Table 6 – Are there any businesses, projects or potential uses which you are aware of which may be suited to this site?

Type of Use	Responses	Examples provided
Cafe	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darcy Street Project, Parramatta (2) • Circa Café, Parramatta (2) • Substation Café, Alexandria • Shaka Café, Freshwater • Three Ropes Coffee, Parramatta • Operator 25, Melbourne
Small Bar	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncle Kurt's, Parramatta (3) • Japanese-styled bar (2) • Circa Café (bar enterprise), Parramatta
Facilities for the homeless	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cubicles for sleeping in (4) • Youth off the Streets • Twenty10
Community Centre	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for Mums and Bubs • 107 Projects • Newtown Centre • Menshed
Gallery	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pari Ari, Parramatta
Reuse/Repair Centre	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bower, Parramatta

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawkesbury Remakery
Others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University/training space (2) • Fitness provider • Hardware incubator • Bike hire • Bakery • Board games hub • Charity shop • Garden/farm • Live music • Museum

The results received from this question generally reflect the results received in the other questions discussed above, being that the most commonly suggested ideas for a suitable use of the substation include:

1. Café
2. Small Bar
3. Facilities for the homeless

3.4. Times of Activation

Respondents were asked what time of the day or week they would be most likely to visit a business within the Parramatta CBD Southern Precinct. This question was asked to provide an indication of at what time a future use of the substation should focus on operating to encourage viability. Respondents were permitted to select all times that may apply. Results from this question are shown below in **Figure 4**.

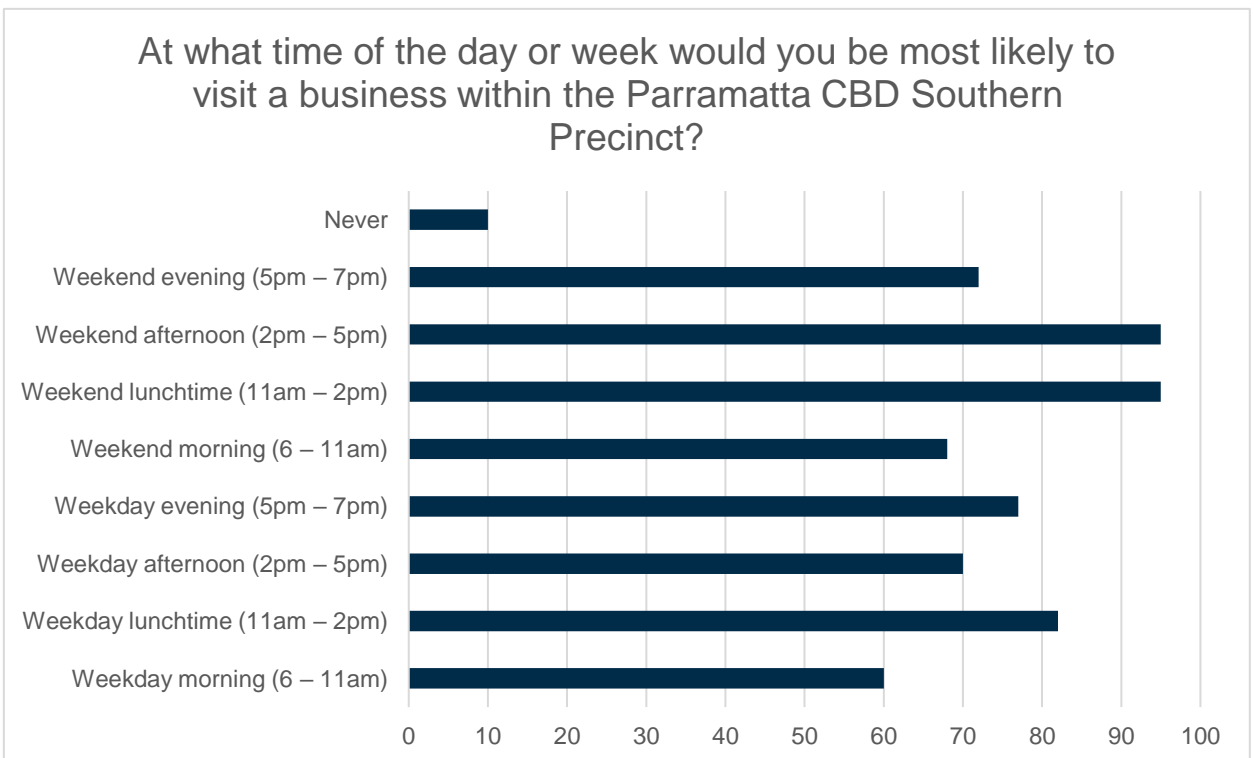


Figure 4 - Time of the week when respondents would most likely visit the CBD Southern Precinct

Given that respondents could pick all times that could apply, the results of this question generally indicate that a business or use that operates at any of the above times could be viable. In particular, the results indicate that respondents would be most willing to visit a business that is operating on the weekend between 11am and 5pm. This window particularly represents a 'destination style' café which respondents would be willing to travel to for the experience.

It is noted that the engagement period occurred during Covid-19 related restrictions applied. The immediate local vicinity of the substation is primarily comprised of commercial office towers who would be most likely to activate the area on weekdays which were generally underscored in this question. This may indicate lack of engagement with this user group during this engagement period. It is recommended that future engagement on this project prioritise seeking feedback from commercial workers, should there be a time when workers are not predominantly working from home.

3.5. Extent of works to the building

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which works should occur to the building. The question was asked to inform whether Council should consider expanding or reducing the building footprint as part of the architectural brief.

Respondents were asked to choose which option they would most support out of a range of possible interventions that could be made to the building. The responses, as listed by order of preference, included:

- Mainly retain the existing building footprint, with a future trading area located within the surrounding public space – 60%
- Expand the building footprint to provide a larger trading area protected from weather elements – 34%
- Reduce the building footprint to expand the available public space – 6%

These results (as shown below in **Figure 5**) demonstrate a clear desire from the community to undertake minimal works to the building, if any at all.

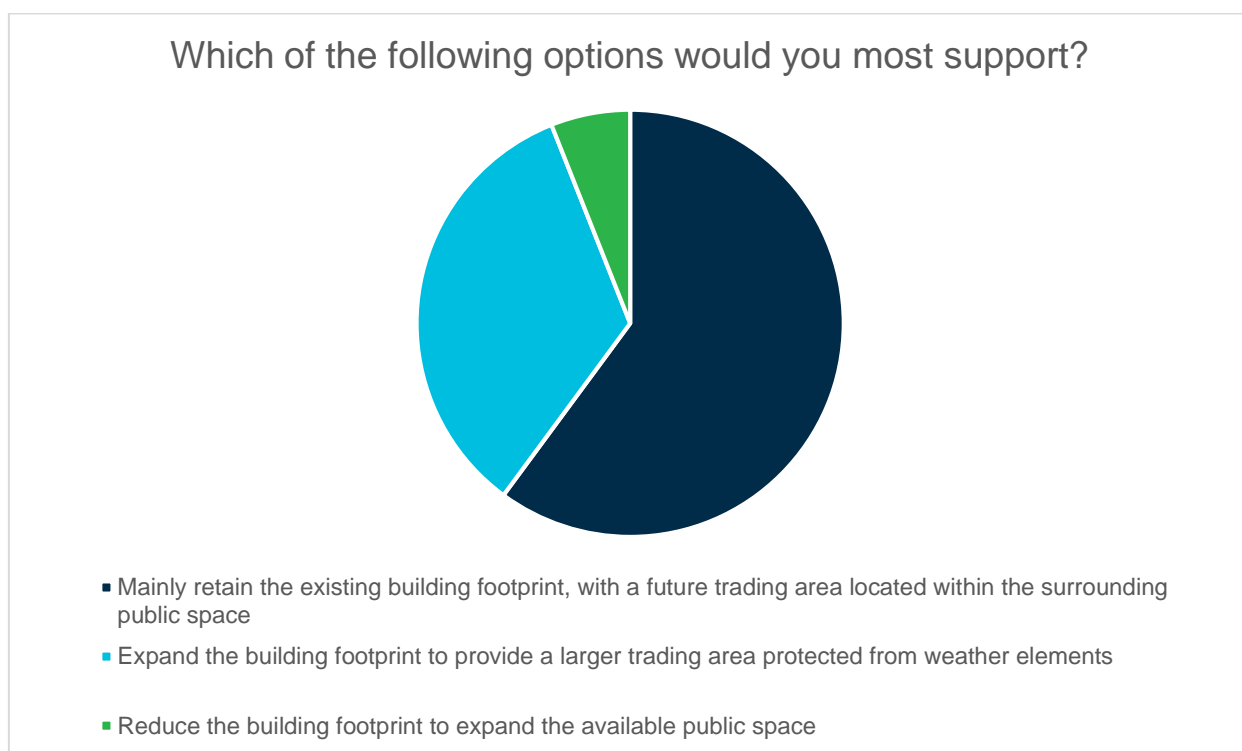


Figure 5 - Extent of Works to the Building

4. Next Steps

Council will progress investigations into the viability of the following uses:

1. Café
2. Small Bar
3. Facilities for the homeless

These viability investigations will include consideration of:

- Extent of works required to be undertaken to make the site suitable for use including:
 - Installation of toilets, storage and other facilities required by the Building Code of Australia
 - Works to be undertaken to the surrounding public domain;
 - Works specific to each use (e.g. kitchen elements, 'capsule style' sleeping arrangements for the homeless, installation of a bar etc.); and
 - Lighting, ventilation and other internal design elements.
- Planning approvals process;
- Investigation of potential partners to deliver/fund the project, including a potential Expressions of Interests process which could include involving a delivery partner to assume responsibility for the extent of works to be undertaken;
- If the project is to be delivered entirely by Council, business cases will need to be prepared and approved to secure appropriate funding for any use which requires ongoing public funding;
- Assessment of whether the proposed use is consistent with the objectives of the project; and
- Internal Council staff and Councillor consultation.

This process is anticipated to take up to 12 months. As mentioned in **Section One**, streetscape upgrades are planned to occur on Valentine Avenue which are currently in Concept Design stage. The project may need to consider whether there would be any advantage to works being undertaken simultaneously to the streetscape upgrade and may be influenced by the progression of that project.

At the conclusion of the viability investigations, a recommendation of a future use and design to upgrade the building will be made. It is anticipated that the community will have the opportunity to provide feedback on this recommendation prior to any works being undertaken on the site.