

HOBART LOCAL AREA PRECINCTS PLAN

- AITPM Excellence Awards -
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INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the 'Hobart Local Retail Precincts Plan' for the AITPM Excellence Awards 2017 within the Transport Planning category.

MRCagney partnered with [Inspiring Place](#), [John Mongard Landscape Architects](#), [Village Well](#), and [Fresh Start Communications](#) to deliver a plan to revitalise some of Hobart's iconic main streets. MRCagney was the project lead and headed the development and execution of the extensive community and trader consultation.

Our client, Hobart City Council originally sought input from consultants to prepare streetscape improvements to six main street retail precincts within the city that had until this point received little recent Council investment.

However, with a soft budget in the order of \$3-5 million for streetscape works, MRCagney recommended that this initial investment would likely be spread too thin to achieve meaningful change to all six precincts, and that the budget would be better spent in up to two precincts.

In order to prioritise funding, MRCagney proposed an innovative engagement strategy founded on the principles of *tactical urbanism*, whereby traders would orchestrate a half-day event to trial footpath, road space, and streetscape interventions to highlight to Council where investment in permanent changes will elicit the greatest positive change.

The project team conducted workshops for each precinct to inspire traders to drive their own events as a means to secure investment in self-determined strategies that will reap benefits for their businesses as well as the broader community.

These workshops focused on identifying what makes a successful main street, the difference between a vibrant main street and a 'convenience centre', and building capacity amongst attendees to critically evaluate the value of underutilised public realm space, car parking and wasted road space.

Traders were then invited to identify any initiatives to improve or re-purpose elements of their main streets that could be tested in a public event using Council's broad catalogue of public furniture and event materials.



The six main streets included in this study were:

- Augusta Road, Lenah Valley (Giblin Street to Greenway Avenue);
- Elizabeth Street, Hobart (Burnett Street to Bathurst Street);
- Hampden Road, Battery Point (Colville Street to Sandy Bay Road);
- Macquarie Street, South Hobart (Southern Outlet to St Johns Hospital);
- New Town Road, New Town (Pirie Street to Ridsden Road); and
- Sandy Bay Road, Lower Sandy Bay (Long Point Road to Beach Road).

Ultimately, traders at 5 of the 6 precincts developed unique and compelling event concepts which were held on the first weekend of September 2015.

***This project embodies best practice
management of Hobart's main
street assets by being attuned to the
place value of main streets***



RELEVANCE TO CATEGORY

Main streets are the focal points of our towns, villages and cities. They are the places where we meet friends, share lunch, spend time and shop. A town without a quality main street is missing out on the most fundamental of public spaces, and its residents forgo the social atmosphere of a thrumming communal space.

This project delivered a uniquely targeted and repeatable process that transport engineers and planners may follow to design better main streets, cognisant of the understanding that while such streets often perform a significant movement function, this cannot veto the cultural and social 'place' value of main streets.

There is an obvious broad appeal to quality main streets, so it makes sense to invest in good ones. But making excellent main streets requires a re-think to the way we approach transport planning and street design. Rather than forwarding free and unconstrained vehicle movement, main streets most importantly need to create an exciting, comfortable and safe environment to support an eclectic mix of community activity. Exactly what constitutes a street environment with such attributes varies with the social, cultural, and economic values and aspirations of each community, and any streetscape project that seeks to impart significant change on such a crucial physical element of a communities social fabric is fraught with risk if it is not authentically driven by the community itself.

When streetscape works are developed by a team of consultants without truly collaborative engagement with the affected community, there is a clear danger that either:

1. The community rejects the proposed concepts during consultation;
2. The community never fully utilise the constructed interventions as envisioned by the consultants.

In either case, this represents a huge opportunity cost in terms of time and money.

Rather than providing an outsiders perspective on how to improve the function of the main streets by developing concept designs for subsequent public display, the project team undertook a methodology whereby local traders themselves were encouraged to conceptualise and test ideas with temporary tactical interventions. Successful ideas thus clearly demonstrated the ability for local traders to engage with their surrounding community and generate the greatest benefit from the works proposed. Conversely, unsuccessful ideas failed cheaply and early (prior to further concept development by consultants).

As detailed herein, MRCagney's innovative delivery of the Hobart Local Area Precincts Plan presented City of Hobart clear and tested recommendations to unlock the latent main street qualities of some of the city's waning suburban precincts based on a tactical urbanism approach that minimises risk, maximises benefits, and reduces costs.

Not only was this approach successful in Hobart, we believe our process presents a new best practice methodology for conceptualising, prioritising and delivering main street revitalisation works.

EXCELLENCE ATTRIBUTES

This project focused on regenerating some of Hobart's ailing suburban main streets by identifying where Council's streetscape investments will be most influential in creating vibrant, social, main streets for the community. It represents excellence by achieving unprecedented depth of collaborative community consultation, and delivering uniquely tailored and tested solutions to re-establish vibrant, walkable and people-focused urban environments in these previously ailing main streets.

True 'main streets' are fundamentally different to 'convenience centres' in concept and function. A convenience centre caters primarily to short, single use stops. They provide the community fast, easy, convenient access to routine products, and trade on accessibility by car in lieu of pedestrian activity. They are the places where we drop in quickly to pick up a newspaper, a loaf of bread, or a bottle of milk.

They do not, however, invite customers to spend time, wander, meet friends, stay for lunch, or explore offerings from other retailers. The retail mix is typically narrow and uniform, and a reliance on car based trade generates little passing pedestrian traffic, which creates little incentive for retailers to cultivate welcoming, attractive shop fronts.

As a result, the average customer spends less, in fewer shops, and stays for a shorter period of time. What's more, this model of development reduces the value of the street as a public space, and while there is clearly some demand for simple, short stay shopping, the return to the greater community in both social and economic terms is reduced.

Main streets, in contrast, thrive on pedestrian interaction at street level. They are fundamentally people focused spaces, and aim to retain visitors for extended periods of time. They return value to the broader community as important social spaces, and to the retail community by supporting accessible foot traffic past shop-fronts.

In comparison to convenience centres, main street retailers realise enormous benefits by co-locating in shared precincts. The pedestrian focused ethos of successful main streets invariably results in visitors passing a range of shop fronts on foot on their way to their chosen destination. This in turn supports multiple purpose trips and induces unintended or unplanned purchases. In doing so, main street retailers create mutual success in a way that short stay focused convenience centres simply cannot.

Creating main streets that support these richer and more varied purposes requires a deep appreciation for how appropriate traffic behaviour, streetscapes, urban structures and scales, active and well articulated frontages, hardscaping and softscaping elements, and a myriad of other concepts contribute to inviting streets where people tend to stay, linger and spend.

A unique aspect of this project was that the project team themselves did not synthesize concept designs that resolved all these elements. Rather, by supporting a diverse group of traders through an informative capacity building exercise the project team empowered five main street trader groups to formulate and champion their own visions for the future of their main streets. The truly excellent outcome of this process is not only that some exciting and innovative streetscape concepts were developed, but that the local communities now have a more connected, united and informed trading group who have genuine ownership of the direction of their environment. This alone will ensure that Council investments that follow will be fully welcomed and utilised by local traders, and will ultimately contribute to active, engaged, and prosperous main streets for their broader communities.

ORIGINALITY AND INNOVATION

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical urbanism is a community-led approach to neighbourhood building using short-term, low-cost and scalable interventions intended to drive long term change.

Emerging from North America from around 2010, tactical urbanism simply refers to any number of techniques that test ideas for placemaking and building community spaces. The tactical element however is crucial, and differentiates tactical urbanism interventions from 'pop-up' installations, whether a food cart, parklet, or street event, that do not seek to catalyse permanent change.

The power of tactical urbanism is in its ability to empower those most affected - traders, residents, the community as a whole - to quickly and cheaply conceptualise and test ambitious ideas. It also reduces risk because successful interventions clearly demonstrate real, verified, community endorsement of concept, which moreover instills a sense of community 'ownership' of the project. Conversely, an unsuccessful intervention simply represents the earliest and cheapest failure of concept, without need for architectural designs, modelling, or economic forecasting.

Some of the earliest, and most noteworthy, examples of successful tactical urbanism interventions originate in New York. In Times Square, a simple tactical urbanism intervention that covered road space with lawn chairs demonstrated the value of returning road space to people space. The intervention resonated with the general public, and catalysed a gradual process of removing cars from Times Square.

Our Approach

The unique aspect of MRCagney's approach to the Hobart Local Area Precincts Plan is that is (to our knowledge) the first time in Australia that tactical urbanism interventions, organised and undertaken by local traders, have been used by a local government as the core tool to conceptualise and prioritise street and/or public space revitalisation projects.

MRCagney initially led a series of capacity building workshops with local traders from each street to discuss what typical ingredients form a successful main street, and invited each trader group to hold an event for 1 day to showcase and test their proposed interventions. Traders were provided access to Council's substantial catalogue of materials, plants and furniture, and Council took care of any required traffic management plans and permits.

Empowering traders themselves to consider and test the interventions that they feel will benefit themselves and the community the most fostered a true sense of ownership of their proposals, and creates the greatest chance of sustained success post implementation. Additionally, the process opens new communication channels and strengthens the connection between traders and their community.

Ultimately, the process ensures that any subsequent investments in the street are tested and proven to be welcome and beneficial. In Hobart, our tactical urbanism approach has yielded some truly bold and unique streetscape concepts that have progressed through the detailed design phase, with construction expected to begin in 2017.

A true test of the value of our approach is that eventual 'winning' streets were initially considered some of the least likely to benefit from streetscape investment. It was simply through committed action of local traders that real connections to vibrant local communities were demonstrated, proving to the project team that these streets would benefit most from Council's streetscape investment. Clearly, a more conventional approach to the project would not yield such beneficial results.



Above: underutilised space in New Town

Right: New Town traders held a tactical urbanism intervention testing closure of two minor streets to create a village green



Event Day!

Over two days on the first weekend in Spring, 5 trader and community groups from 5 of Hobart's key main streets held tactical urbanism events in what was for a significant part cold and miserable weather. The MRCagney team approximated that the events were attended by well over 2,000 people.

This was a truly unique if not unprecedented event, and provided Council not only a clear mandate for works, but a clear channel of communication with the various groups in each main street. Aside from testing treatments for imminent permanent works, Council has a blueprint for a possible future street festival, and has created at least four new trader groups that can work together to further the future of their particular main street.

Some highlights from each of these streets include:

'Linger Longer in Lenah Valley'

Augusta Road in Lenah Valley went all out for a Saturday afternoon event that encouraged people to 'Linger Longer in Lenah Valley'. This was a compact people focused event, and despite the rain was extremely well attended.

The trading group formed into an enthusiastic and cohesive group working towards a clear vision for their street. The interventions tested included a mid-block pedestrian crossing, kerb extensions, and additional footpath space at the expense of some on-street parking. The trader group displayed an excellent connection to their local community and had no trouble attracting a significant crowd to the event. There were lots of attractions of course, not least of all a great sausage sizzle, but the people were there primarily to be part of the Lenah Valley community, and it was a genuine pleasure to be there, rain and all.

The team surveyed about 60 attendees at the event throughout the afternoon. 76% of the people considered themselves local and 44% of the people surveyed walked to the event. These excellent figures indicate that even in the rain and with a relatively low density housing mix around the main street, Augusta Road has the ability to engage with its local community and generate foot traffic. These are both strong indicators that future works will be welcome and successful.



Figure: 'Linger Longer in Lenah Valley'

‘Paws and Feet on Elizabeth Street’

Elizabeth Street traders put on a truly unique event highlighting that there were limited opportunities for people to participate in main street activities with a pet. Their theme of “bring your paws and feet to Elizabeth Street” was a collaborative idea supported by a large trader group and the Tasmanian Guide Dogs for the Blind who are located within the study area.

Tactical interventions focused on addressing an over-allocation of street space for cars in order to provide a better street environment for people. Adding greenery and space to sit and linger with your pet were consistent themes.

This was one of the best-connected and most unified trader groups, suggesting any investment by Council will be supported and activated. There were however some issues that became apparent, primarily due very limited adjacent residential land use at this inner CBD location. This absence of strong and locally connected resident base somewhat limits the ability of Elizabeth Street to benefit from works outside business hours.

Noting that the nearby development of some significant student accommodation will be completed 2017, it would be interesting to hold a different 18-40 year old focused event in the future.

‘Lounge Room in the Street’ at Battery Point

The Hampden Road event was another spectacular and successful street event providing the team with valuable information on how a more active Hampden Road might behave, and a glimpse towards what Hampden Road users might be looking for in an improved main street.

The event highlighted how willing the retail community was to work together as well as displaying how the community might use more open space if it were provided in the right environment.



Figures: ‘Paws and Feet on Elizabeth Street’

The event trialled multiple street closures, and used reclaimed street space to highlight the need for some additional community open space, and the opportunities for local restaurants to benefit from additional footpath space that would allow activity to spill outside. The event attendees were overwhelmingly local and from a walking catchment which is an excellent indicator of the commercial sustainability of Hampden Road as a main street, with little dependence on car traffic or parking.

However, while well attended and fun, this was really more of a pop up event, rather than a tactical urbanism street design exercise, with some significant issues that would need to be resolved before the concept could be made permanent. Notably, the message from the community was for the most part eagerly in favour of exploring the concept tested as a somewhat regular street event, however there were significant reservations expressed with regard to street closures being made permanent.

‘Village Street Party’ at South Hobart

The South Hobart event was a very well attended event. It was compact and the community that attended was genuinely and proudly local. They clearly illustrated what makes the street unique, attracting people from school age to retirement age from the local schools, the local retirement village, and the local aged care facility.

The tactical interventions trialled centered around forgoing some on-street parking in order to create more footpath space, and to narrow some of the street crossings to enable safer pedestrian crossing.

The problematic aspect of the South Hobart precinct was that there were very few retailers involved in the organisation of the event. This is an issue as trader involvement was a key factor identified by the MRCagney team in order to be confident in recommending a scheme that the retail community genuinely “owns” and engages with.

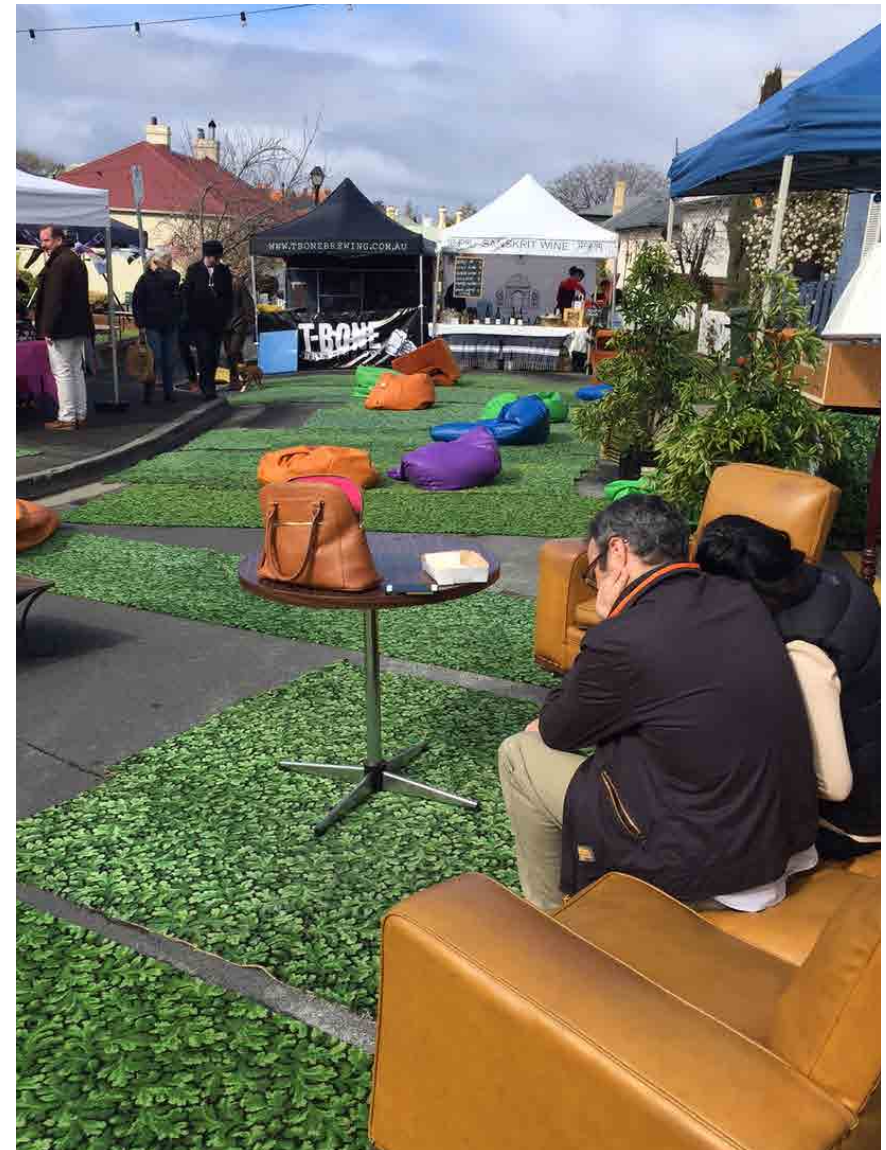


Figure: ‘Lounge Room in the Street’ at Battery Point

The tactical urbanism approach is specifically designed for the retailers to test the scheme they want. The event that was held at South Hobart, as successful as it was, was the work of a very committed community and the project team could not be certain that the scheme tested is a scheme the business community would be committed to. Following the event, the team received feedback directly from traders that they would prefer a different scheme, and thought that the scheme would impact them in a negative way. This might not be the case, however implementing the proposed scheme would certainly be a case of selling them somebody else's scheme. This is exactly what the tactical urbanism process is designed to avoid.

‘Twilight on the Green’ at New Town

This was another well attended twilight event that was almost a festival in itself. The event tested the closure of Cross Street and Valentine Street and involved the private open space in front of the adjacent old church building.

It was a very large event, but through an extremely hard working traders group, they were able to successfully fill a very large space with hundreds of people and manufacture a genuine village green atmosphere with temporary materials. In contrast to Battery Point however, there was strong community feedback indicating a desire for the intervention to be made permanent.

This was a leading event in terms of two primary criteria - it demonstrated a well-connected and enthusiastic traders group, and the community showed a real latent demand for community street space.

The team surveyed approximately 70 attendees at the event throughout the afternoon. 77% of the people considered themselves local and 53% of the people surveyed walked to the event. People who walked to the event averaged a 450m walk (about 5 minutes). These excellent figures demonstrate that New Town Road can attract a local walking catchment as all quality main streets do.

The ability to engage the local community during the event, a compatibility with walking trips, and some small but interesting clusters of commercial activity show that New Town Road has significant potential beyond being simply a convenience centre primarily for 5 minute drop in trips.



Figures: ‘Village Street Party’ at South Hobart

The Learnings

Augusta Road at Lenah Valley was an outstanding event. They sorted all their issues out internally and held an event that tested the type of treatments they wanted permanently. This was the standout result from the weekend.

New Town Road at New Town also put on an excellent event. There was more of a 'pop-up' feel to it rather than testing a long term outcome, however the traders came together extremely well and demonstrated that any investment there by the City would be welcome, appreciated and used by the local community.

Elizabeth Street put on the most adventurous and unusual event. This event however did bring together a great group of traders who Council can continue to work with.

Macquarie Street in South Hobart had a very popular event organised by an enthusiastic local community seeking improvements. The community have indicated from the event that they would support any investment in the street.

Hampden Road in Battery Point could potentially be one of the great main streets in Australia. It does however have the added complication of being a genuine mixed-use street, and may struggle to create vibrant and active commercial and retail space and maintain residential amenity at the same time.

The event, whilst it was very 'pop-up' in nature, did demonstrate some of the potential to utilise street space to create a more vibrant environment, however the team received notable feedback from locals concerned about any loss of convenience, increase in noise, and loss of parking.

Figure: 'Twilight on the Green' at New Town



EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Following the street events, each intervention was evaluated based on the cohesion of the trading community, the connection of the local community to each main street, the potential for activation demonstrated by each event, and the compatibility of the proposals with Council's long term city vision.

Two outstanding street events were ultimately selected by the project team, and detailed concept plans developed in conjunction with some indicative costings to assist Council to move to subsequent detailed design and implementation phases.

The two 'winning' streets selected were Augusta Road, Lenah Valley and New Town Road, New Town. Other streets that were not selected were nonetheless provided with some further concept plans and advice to give direction to how the proposals could be improved and further developed in the future. The project team recommended that Council continue to work with the trader groups, and hold another series of events the following year to provide the communities another opportunity to demonstrate their ideas.



Figures (left to right): Elizabeth Street, Hampden Road and Macquarie Street concept designs

Augusta Road, Lenah Valley

The concept design produced for Augusta Road, Lenah Valley sought to implement the trader groups visions for a recreated main street with a safe pedestrian crossing, street trees, and ample footpath space for outdoor dining.

The concept design returns street space to local traders, who so aptly demonstrated an ability to activate additional footpath space during the street event. Existing median/turning lanes cater to Augusta Roads traffic carrying function and on balance represents a poor investment of space that returns little to the community when contrasted with the huge repressed demand for quality people-focused space and an active, social main street environment uncovered during the street event.

Reclaiming this space will allow activity from adjoining traders to spill out into generously extended footpaths and imbue the street with a genuine social quality and community focus.

Deciduous street trees further reinforce the people-focused re-purposing of the streetscape, creating shade, aesthetic quality, and perceived 'side-friction'.

A new out-bound bus stop shelter compliments the existing, albeit aging, in-bound shelter, which may also be upgraded at the discretion of Transport Tasmania.

Kerb build out treatments at intersections will reduce pedestrian exposure to turning car traffic, reduce turning traffic speeds by tightening intersection geometry, and will create visual signals that increases drivers' awareness of pedestrians. Narrowing of side streets also provides increased kerb space on Augusta Road, allowing the existing 19 parking spaces between Giblin Street and Greenway Avenue to be maintained in the concept design.

A new pedestrian crossing provides a safe and inviting connection between the medical centre and the pharmacy, creates a catalyst for activating the northern side of Augusta Road, and improves pedestrian access to the main street more generally.

Introducing quality bench seating will also improve walkability, particularly amongst members of the community sensitive to long, unbroken walking segments.

Reduced lane widths, increased 'side-friction' and a reduced perceived speed environment will accommodate bike riders within traffic lanes and encourage them to 'own the space'. Given the amount of street-side activity, on-street parking turnover, and driveways/turning traffic, dedicated kerbside bike lanes may not achieve a real safety benefit in comparison to a well designed environment that invites bike riders to visibly integrate with traffic through a low-speed main street section of Augusta Road. Dedicated bike lanes are however encouraged elsewhere on Augusta Road as part of broader bike plan for Hobart.

The proposed concept creates a genuine urban village main street environment with a new focus on people, not cars, and provides the quality meeting, dining and interactional space that traders and the broader community has requested.

It was recommended that the proposed design could be constructed for under \$2,000,000 to a high quality level of finish.

Following the completion of the project, the City of Hobart progressed through detailed design, and construction of the scheme is understood to be undertaken in 2017.



- ① Augusta Road: Narrower carriage ways and centre line for traffic calming. Avenue of deciduous shade trees planted either side of roadway for traffic calming and beautification
- ② Safe crossing point
- ③ Improved footpath; generous width with quality surface. Footpath Width on Southern edge of Augusta road allows for placement of temporary items such as cafe tables and chairs
- ④ Widening of footpaths at road intersections to allow for safer crossing, and traffic calming
- ⑤ Quality shelter, with bus stop relocated to this area
- ⑥ Parking bays located parallel to road way; total of 19 car parks on Augusta Road, between Giblin Street and Greenway Ave
- ⑦ Accessible Carpark
- ⑧ Quality benches
- ⑨ Low level garden beds under deciduous shade trees
- ⑩ Bike racks
- ⑪ Banner and poster poles spaces at varying intervals along length of pavement

Figure: Concept design for Augusta Road, Lenah Valley

New Town Road, New Town

The New Town traders group planned an event to test the closure two street sections in order to create a new village square. The event was a great success, the traders showed great enthusiasm for the concept, and the community expressed an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the event. In response, the project team developed a concept plan that delivers a vibrant village square and village green that will define and reinvigorate New Town's civic hub, consistent with the traders' scheme. It was recommended the scheme could be implemented for in the order of \$3,000,000.

It is envisaged that the village square project will catalyse steady renewal of the entire street over time by introducing activity to the area and engaging the local community.

Aside from the wave of feedback expressing how much people enjoyed the event, some misgivings were nonetheless expressed by some attendees regarding street closures and the impact on traffic circulation and parking bays. It was therefore recommended that some additional consultation would be required to inform detailed design.

Since the completion of the project, Council has progressed with detailed design, and it understood construction is planned for 2018.

LEGEND

1. The Village Square with central landmark.
2. Illuminated pedestrian crossing and crossing lights relocated to this location.
3. Pedestrian crossing and build out removed. Bus stop relocated 25 metres to east of existing location. Four new car park bays. One 10min bay.
4. Linemark and shade car parking.
5. Safe informal crossing to shops.
6. Wide gardens with deciduous shade trees.
7. Paved alfresco dining and public sitting areas.
8. Space for temporal events, marquees and market stalls.
9. Village green – level turf area with seating and garden terraces.
10. Cobble turn-around courtyard.
11. Driveway access retained.
12. Improved footpaths.
13. Pneumatic bollards for emergency and service vehicle access.
14. Narrower carriageways and centerline for traffic calming.



Vision

A vibrant village square and village green will be created to shape Newtown's civic hub. Additional parking will be designed on Newtown Road. Newtown Village Square will provide space for events, gatherings, play and alfresco dining. Traffic calming and safer crossings will be created in the precinct to reconnect the village retail area.

Figure: Concept design for New Town Road, New Town

SUMMARY

The 'Hobart Local Retail Precincts Plan' has delivered uniquely tailored main street revitalisation concepts to the City of Hobart, based on innovative tactical urbanism principles.

The use of tactical urbanism to conceptualise, develop, prioritise and implement streetscape improvements by a local government is unprecedented in Australia, and we believe this approach represents a new best practice.

By empowering local traders to champion the development of their own streetscape interventions, the project team has fostered stronger ties to the community, more united and connected traders groups, and will ultimately deliver streetscape renewal works that are proven to be welcome and successful.