



## The NEW BRIGHTON RETAIL POLL Dec 2019

**Conducted by Brian Donovan, New Brighton Residents Assn.**

### **BACKGROUND:**

Between July and September 2019, the New Brighton Residents Assn conducted a poll of residents in its central catchment area between Gresham Tce and Shackleton St.

One of the questions asked: *"What do you like least about your neighbourhood?"*

The majority answer was: *"Lack of decent shops"*, (effectively the Mall) and this option was well ahead of *"crime"* and *"state of the roads"*.

As a consequence of this result, it became apparent the New Brighton Mall is the main issue for local residents, and in the absence of an active group representing the retailers, it was decided a survey be taken of that group to get feedback on their businesses in relation to the Mall.

The aim was to cover every operator from Marine Pde to Union St and Shaw Av on both sides of the block bordered by Hawke and Beresford Sts. (see diagram). We did not cross the road to the south-side of either Union St or Shaw Av.

While there were a number of questions we could have asked, it was decided not to go too deeply into the retail demographics and stick to a basic theme around why they came to New Brighton, how they were faring, and whether there was an intention to be here on a long-term basis.

Furthermore, to be as inclusive as possible, the survey was translated into three other languages aside from English.

It is calculated at least 95% of the retailers in the area outlined completed this survey.

The survey and this report were compiled in two weeks.

## **HISTORY**

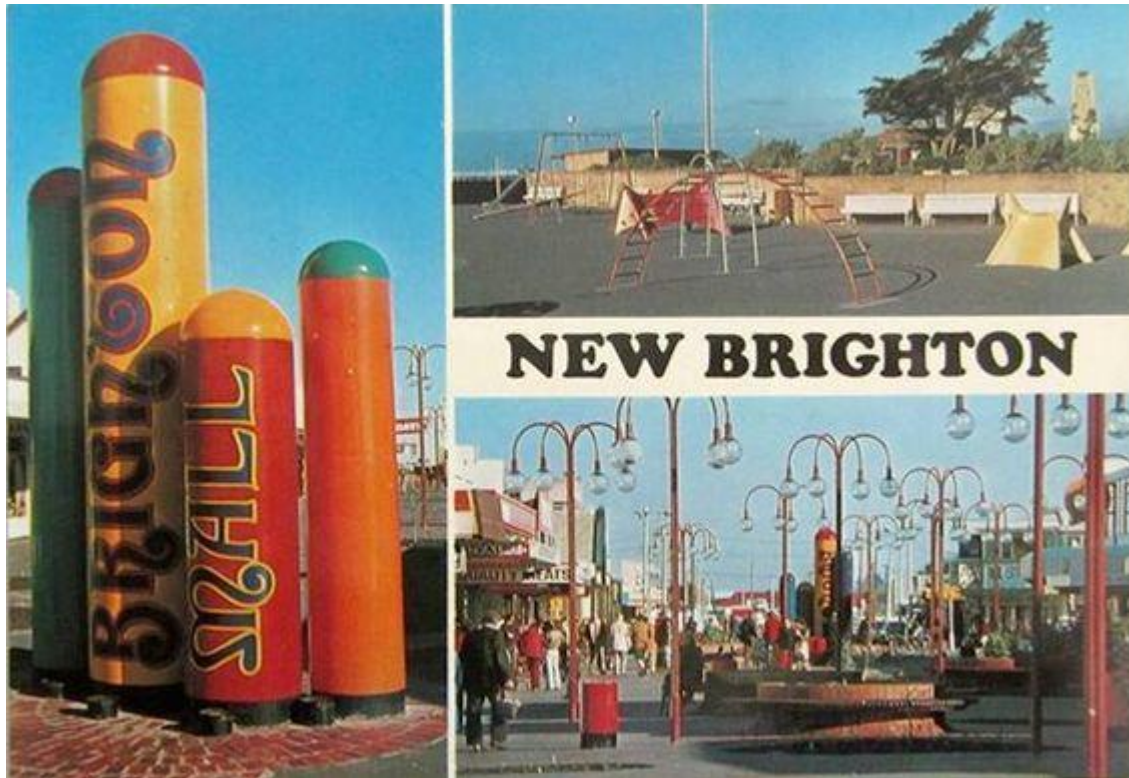
New Brighton has a long history of retail from the early 1900's when it was the destination by the sea, and visitors came out for that very reason. It offered a dabble at the beach, walk amongst the dunes and pier, and a nice supper of tea and cake or fish and chips.

Fast forward to the 1960s, New Brighton was Christchurch's only shopping centre open on a Saturday, so for some time it was all go for the retailers meaning New Brighton was the only place in Christchurch for people who worked all week to get to the shops and as a result business thrived.



In the late 60's and early 70's and then into the 80s slowdown and with wane of the 90's, it was a vibrant street packed with shoppers on a Saturday with big named stores offering their wares... Whitcoulls, Beaths, Gracies, Dowsons, Weinkeller Wines, Woolworths, McKenzies, Farmers, Supervalu Supermarket, Shackels and MMM butcheries, Galvins Jeans, Staffords, Mitre Ten, Hurst & Drake, and more.

Looking to enhance the shopping experience, a proposal to close Seaview Road to traffic was first initiated in 1963, and after town planning, traffic management and parking surveys were carried out in cooperation with the New Brighton District Business Association, the design for the mall by the City Council's Architect's Division was approved in 1974. Construction started in May 1977, and the Mall was officially opened by the Mayor, Sir Hamish Hay, on 25 February 1978.



However, in 1980 the introduction of nationwide Saturday trading came about followed by seven-day trading, meaning 1990's activity at the New Brighton Mall declined significantly to such a state that all the major retailers left, and most large shops ended up closing.

Nobody seemed to have anticipated the effects and make provision for changes to adapt to the new market conditions.

Once the degradation of the Mall had set in, several attempts to revitalize the shopping area including setting up a taskforce including one or two of the prominent property owners in the 1990's, who came up with one idea of high rise buildings on the central ocean frontage, but this idea was rejected by the community after public submissions.

Led by the City Council, changes to the road layout have been made more than once into the year 2000, with each new design or addition being hailed as the new beginning for the once popular part of the city. The last change was to allow vehicles to drive down the one-way for part of the mall instead of it being solely pedestrian.

These initiatives have not worked partly due them being piece-meal actions and not ultimately contributing anything to the 2015 New Brighton Master Plan.

At the same time, the Council asked Development Christchurch Limited (DCL) to undertake the staged implementation of this Master Plan, containing a strategic vision to reinvent New Brighton again as Christchurch's eastern playground.

The vision has stated goals and big picture' themes, to be delivered through detailed implementation actions. These were designed to encourage Council, private sector, community and government-led decision-making to align and move forward together in a logical sequence.

It also involves working with private landowners, businesses, investors and the community to successfully revitalise New Brighton's commercial centre through a combination of new investment and development.

DCL's own mission statement is: *"A key part of our vision is to ensure communities are involved in the decisions that affect them."*

And to *"provide an effective point of engagement for community groups and other key stakeholders in areas DCL has an active interest"*.

In the Council's Annual Plan, completed in June 2016, the Council approved \$3m of annual funding to DCL for the next five years.

There is concern the 2021, when this agreement comes up for renewal, DCL will not have completed the establishment of the 2015 New Brighton Mall Master Plan or anything close to it.

### **December RETAIL SURVEY RESULTS:**

The response numbers related to each question have not been included here, but 52 retailers provided the basis for the following information.

#### **Positive notes from the survey**

- The high number of businesses which have operated in the Mall for 3 years of more, up to 32 years in one case and 21 years in another.
- The majority view is, the feeling about being in New Brighton Mall is 'OK', with much fewer 'Disappointing'. Only a very small number came back with 'Extremely Pleased' or 'Disastrous'
- The overwhelming majority are in it for the long haul and don't intend to leave in the short-term at least.
- There is significant number who rate *supportive fellow retailers* as an important feature of New Brighton (in the absence of anybody else).
  - The majority opinion do not rate Mall crime (in the guise of trouble-makers and shop lifters) as a problem, ethnic business owners in particular less bothered.

- Most predominant reason for locating the business to New Brighton was '*cheaper rent*', though the opportunity to '*share premises*, and the hope (more than belief) '*the Mall was going to be improved*'.
- There is an overall perception of the current Mall being reasonably tidy, despite its run-down look.
- Events like the Saturday market, fireworks, Coast to Coast and events which bring people in bulk to New Brighton, is a much needed cash register boost for many, and see this suburb as ultimately a destination point, but we need to change the perception of New Brighton first, and that is unlikely with the Mall the way it is..

### **Concerning features of the survey**

- The continuing roller coaster of retailers looking to exit the Mall, and at the time of the survey this was eight either considering, or had made the decision and found new premises elsewhere...a significant and alarming statistic for this suburban mall.
- Large number of complaints about lackadaisical landlords or property management agents who provide minimal or luke-warm support for retail tenants greatly outweighed the few positive comments about landlords/agents. The negative comments included refusing to improve the shopfront or immediate environment and carpark, and poor response to basic maintenance like roof leaks.
- The lack of a business association to support the retailers was the second biggest concern.



- Number one bitch of retailers is the lack of foot traffic, lack of customers. A couple of retailers stated they brought the majority of their customers with them and relied on outsiders more than the locals (above photo taken 10.45am Canterbury Anniversary Holiday 2019 where shops were open).
- A surprising number of businesses are making minimal money (and the operators forced to work a second job or have a partner working outside their business), and cannot afford staff. They point to a turnover barely providing a living wage and a therefore a challenge to purchase new stock.
- The survey indicated little visibility from Development Christchurch Ltd, which is contrary to what some thought would be part of its job. The vast majority have not heard of this organisation, or those who have knowledge of DCL, have no concept of its development role in relation to the Mall.

**Other general comments:**

- The majority feeling is an '*upgrade of the Mall is urgently required*', and those with longer memories have less faith it will actually happen, after countless failures (in their mind) to turn things around over the years.
- The scattered nature of outlets across the Mall make it difficult for the customer to experience a centralised shopping experience. Many complained of the gaps in-between are ugly and made up of deserted, deteriorating buildings or just empty sections. There is a keenness to see these filled with anything giving life and breath to the Mall.
- It is clear the majority of retailers and residents have had enough of land-banking or "greedy" land-owners and believe this situation has gone on far too long. There are questions why this situation has not been dealt with years ago by the Council through compulsory acquisition.
- Two retailers tell of being prevented from starting up fresh businesses in the Mall, and another businessperson had developers willing to invest in particular properties, but no deals have been able to be done due to the unrealistic expectations of the land-owners concerned.
- Some of the buildings require earthquake strengthening or a considerable amount of work to be brought up to standard.
- The bigger buildings at southern end of the Mall are becoming less attractive and likely to be empty by the middle of next year as tenants move on, largely due to one particular intransigent landowner.
- It should be made clear there are motivated landlords with the will to see New Brighton and the Mall get ahead, unfortunately there is a small group with large or strategic land-holdings who appear to be the problem.
- Most of the existing buildings containing active businesses have shoddy, dated and uninspiring exteriors. One or two business operators have made some attempts to brighten up their premises at their own expense and struggle with the property agent.
- Older people will not venture into parts of the Mall due to the dangerous nature of sections of the carparking bordering Hawke St. From a health and safety point of view, the responsibility of an accident lies squarely with negligent landowners.
- There is little spill over of customers from Countdown and to a lesser extent Couplands, to surrounding businesses. The design of the Mall and location of both contribute to this. There is no guide to the potential shopper at entry points into the Mall indicating what retail outlets exist.
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- There has been a drift of some businesses from one side of the Mall on Seaview Rd to the other because the one-side gets no sun and this can be a factor in winter.

- There is a recognition the hot pools and beach, pier, library will be a significant attraction and the business in the top end of the Mall will benefit, particularly as some of the Marine Pde landscaping will extend a little way into the Mall. The vacant and desolate middle section will see these numbers dissipate and less likely to be drawn into the southern end shops.
- Many older people still patronise banks and physically pay bills rather than use or trust the internet.
- Some of the lanes and malls within the Mall operate better than others, for instance people will walk through to get to the other side, as long as there is something on the other side like more shops, or some other attraction or parking. For instance far fewer traverse 'The Barn' (connects Seaview with Beresford) than 'Carnaby Lane' (Hawke St carpark to road through Mall).
- As for the types of retail enterprises, there is a surprising number of businesses operating in New Brighton...general retail the number one, followed by coffee/food/hospitality.
- Overall the variety of within the Mall ranges from accounting to shoe repairs and key cutting with a mixture of galleries to organic health care including massage and fitness club and a lot more.
- If this number was compacted into half the existing Mall space, there would be far fewer gaps, and maximum use of a compressed area along with the Oram Av extension would serve this ideal.

Since mid-2016 City Council development company Christchurch Development Ltd has been tasked with revitalising New Brighton, following a suburban masterplan written for the area by Council.



(Looking from Hawke St along the proposed Oram Av extension, five years later and there is still not confirmation from DCL or the City Council this will go ahead)

The organisation's brief, according to its website, is to "work with private landowners, businesses, investors, and the community to successfully revitalise New Brighton's commercial centre through a combination of new investment and development."

### **Additional comments made by retailers on the survey forms:**

Reasons for being involved in a business in New Brighton included...

- Needed a small space to display as much of product sold on-line.
- Near a great beach and pier and suits product
- Three respondents indicated "business opportunity"
- Three purchased an existing business
- One wanted to contribute to New Brighton
- Eight indicated a desire to be part of a shared space like '105 Seaview'

In answer to "*what has been the main problem*", other comments included...

- Shoplifting
- Drunks on streets and around playground in the evening
- Lack of Mall signage and promos
- Greedy obstructive land-owners
- Slow council response to repairs for instance seating, bin empties, public toilet cleans.
- Lack of a community police presence in the Mall.

Responses to "where does the Mall go from here":

- Trust the process.

- Restrictions on visiting food trucks and promote locally based.
- Expand the walk-cycle nature and concept of a “village”.
- An immediate paint job on the buildings being used and the derelict ones demolished.
- The current gaps transformed into a temporary active space i.e. urban regeneration ‘Gapfiller’.
- Utilise and promote the spending power of the freedom campers in a funky and welcoming way.
- Get rid of the absentee and greedy landlords.
- Incentives and logistical support to anybody who wants to develop a business venture or landlords prepared to upgrade or remodel a building. There does not appear to be any at the moment (the role of DCL ?).
- Much more youth facilities.

### **Posts from Reddit 4 months ago:**

#### Inside view

“I live in New Brighton and it is depressing. The problem is the land/property owners who would rather landbank their dilapidated properties and weed filled empty lots and wait for better days so they can cash in than actually fix up their properties. Until the council sets bylaws preventing owners from leaving properties vacant and uncared for long periods of time and I doubt anything will change because they have no incentive to do anything with the properties.”

#### Outside view

“Went out there yesterday to visit the furniture shop in the main street there, and the whole area felt like a slum. It was so depressing and New Brighton Mall is an embarrassment.

There's too many dilapidated, outdated buildings lying empty, and a lot of the shops that are still there are pretty shabby.

It would be better off if the whole place was levelled and turned into park area, if they can't rebuild and get tenants.

There's a pretty strong community spirit in New Brighton from what I've seen, and they're doing their best to give it some buzz, but they're really being let down, and hot pools isn't going to change that.”

### **CONCLUSION**

This retail survey result fits with the majority opinion of central New Brighton residents (conducted July-Sept 2019) and earlier 2018 survey conducted by DCL of local residents and identifies the New Brighton Mall as overdue for a major upgrade.

It could be said the reputation of New Brighton as a whole over 30 years where the good name of the destination gradually slipped from “the place to be”, to where it is now, largely because of the gradual deterioration of the Mall.

While in the first instance this survey was a follow through from the resident’s opinions, the retailers have been the forgotten part of the picture.

The revamp of the Mall is a no brainer according to almost everybody you talk to and has been for years. As a result of the neglect of the east by successive City Councils, there is a deep cynicism amongst longer term New Brighton residents.

Observations from various visitors to New Brighton from elsewhere in Christchurch, confirms what they have heard about the Mall, and continues to perpetuate the negative feed-back.

Tourist from outside are generally gobsmacked by unusual situation in Christchurch, where the “best” suburbs are on the other side of town, and a sea-frontage as beautiful as New Brighton’s, has a such a shoddy landscape at its centre.

One of the longer-term retailers stated the suburb needed an energetic leader to call the authorities to account, and unite the main stake-holders to come up with, not a design plan as we have plenty of those, but an **action** plan with deadlines and get the job done.

DCL was charged with the task of getting the 2015 Master Plan for the Mall off the ground and five years later there does not appear to have been any reported progress.

A former prominent New Brighton retailer told me of a survey done a few years back indicating around eighty percent of the local dollar was spent outside of the suburb, and believes the percentage of every dollar today reaching local businesses is now even less, and without Countdown Supermarket, the figure would be more dismal.

The survey paints a bleak picture around the question where respondents were asked to ‘*name good things about the Mall*’, with the respondents (12) who indicated “*nothing*”.

In the view of New Brighton Residents Assn, there are a number of things we can do almost immediately to turn the tide.

One of the actions of DCL would be to support the recovery of the New Brighton Business Assn (NBBA), from its current non active status, and furthermore, gather a taskforce made up of at least one representative of relevant stakeholders including landowners, business owners, residents, and a community board/city council link along with key personnel with relevant skills.

The view is the grand 2015 Master Plan may be years away, but we can be doing something today to make a significant improvement to the Mall outlook and support the retailers by attracting more residents, as the opening of the He Puna Taimoana hot pools and Marine Pde improvements is only months from opening.

This includes a number of smaller achievable projects through building painting (in addition to the current wall art initiatives), planters, signage highlighting shops and attractions.

What about a green space where shoppers can relax as an important part of shopping is socialising and catching-up.

An information centre run by volunteers in a space at the Marine Parade end, of what is available in New Brighton and the Mall.

Attractions through the winter months might include music venues, an outdoor venue for paintball, an outdoor gym for CrossFit, rock-climbing walls.

Surely one of the buildings would be a great place for a microbrewery to be set up. The list of little potential projects is endless.

The first part of a more elaborate plan could be to encourage Marine Parade development between Hawke and Beresford Streets along the section of that road (opposite playground and library) and work back into the top end of the Mall.

It is no secret the landowners for much of that area are keen to see some progress.

The survey also indicates retailers want a voluntary management group to coordinate, communicate and support. DCL must put some effort into recharging the current New Brighton Business Association.

There are numbers of ideas a working group (or revived New Brighton Business Assn) could take to support all shops within the Mall over the next 12 months.

One of its first tasks should be to collaborate with the New Brighton Residents Assn and neighbouring associations, to survey the residents as to what sort of shops they would like to see in the Mall and some idea of their buying habits.

Thank you for participating in this survey and hope you feel inspired to make comments and prepared to receive further information relevant to the Mall and New Brighton.

The survey will be presented to you the retailer first then, Community Board and DCL.

Comments welcome to

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or texts to Brian Donovan 02040400007