

The 2022 Trentham Survey

Summary prepared for the Hepburn Shire Council, January 2023.

The 'Trentham Survey' ran between April and June 2022, appearing in the Trentham Trumpet, and available via QR Code. Printed copies were left at the Post Office, petrol station and Trentham Neighbourhood Centre.

The survey included four categories of multiple-choice questions (responses provided on page x), and four questions that required a written response:

1. *What do you like about living in Trentham?*
2. *What do you like about Trentham's appearance?*
3. *Is there anything that displeases or frustrates you about the town's planning or appearance?*
4. *What would you like 'future Trentham' to look like?*

Two hundred and fifty five people answered the multiple choice questions, and 178 continued on to provide written responses to the four long-form questions – producing an astonishing 20,000 words in total.¹ The response was rapid and heartfelt – residents wanted to contribute.

There was a high degree of uniformity in the answers received. As such, we believe the survey provides a clear and compelling statement of what Trentham residents want for their town.

SUMMARY of FINDINGS

- Residents value Trentham's small and rural nature, sense of community, its space, quietness and access to nature.
- They value its peaceful, non-suburban appearance and lifestyle.
- They are extremely concerned about the amount of subdivision, battle-axe/small blocks and inappropriate development taking place and the lack of planning provisions to prevent this.
- Ideally, they want the town to remain looking as it does, to preserve its identity, with only considered and appropriate development taking place.

¹ For context, Trentham township has 553 occupied houses. Its total resident population is 1,382 (approximately 13% of these are under 14 years). 2021 Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics

Brief synopsis of responses to the four questions

Question One: *What do you like about living in Trentham?*

One hundred and seventy nine people responded, writing over 4,700 words. Almost every single respondent wrote of their love for a small, rural town where nature abounded and people knew each other. (The only exceptions were a few who felt this was being eroded.) They liked the trees, the heritage feel, the natural beauty and the friendliness and peace that small town life offered. Space, quiet, walking, air and open-ness were valued.

Trentham's community was mentioned positively 86 times, the word 'small' (referring to both small town and small population) 63 times, and rural or country feel 57 times.

The remarkable unanimity amongst respondents was largely tied to appreciation of a small, friendly community, in a small and rural setting. People wrote about walking in a peaceful, quiet atmosphere and meeting people they liked. Trentham's small size, harmony with nature and rural feel were critical. Proximity to the forest and appreciation of Trentham's shops and facilities were highly considered.

Many wrote of the need to protect Trentham's unique character - these sentiments appear again in Question Four.

Question Two: *What do you like about Trentham's appearance?*

One hundred and seventy four people responded, writing over 3,330 words.

Respondents expressed a strong love for Trentham's appearance. They valued its historic nature - the words 'historic/al', 'old', 'traditional' and 'heritage' were used (always positively) 118 times - and they were used in reference to Trentham's streetscapes, its buildings (shops and houses) and general character.

Trentham's trees and gardens were mentioned appreciatively 75 times (trees on both public and private land). The town's open, natural spaces were also appreciated, with the word 'space' (as in open space, sense of space, public space and green space), along with 'parks' and 'reserves' mentioned in total 49 times. Possibly allied with this, but given here separately, were the words 'country' and 'rural', mentioned 37 times.

There were also many appreciative mentions of the main (or high) street and its shops (45 in total).

The overall sentiment was that the respondents loved the appearance of their town and wanted to write about it: it mattered to them. They particularly liked its historic appearance, along with its trees, open space, reserves and gardens, its shops and rural nature.

Question Three: *Is there anything that displeases you about the town's planning or appearance?*

This received the strongest response, with 171 respondents writing almost 7,000 words, many of them quite passionate. One issue stood out: 61% of respondents (105) specifically mentioned the extent of subdivision taking place in Trentham as being the thing that displeased or frustrated them. Subdivision was the most commonly used word; also frequently mentioned as displeasing were battle-axe blocks, tiny blocks, high density housing, development, expansion of modern estates, and infill.

Overall, respondents expressed concern that excessive subdivision was eroding Trentham's character, that gardens were being sacrificed and the small town feel was giving way to a more cramped suburban/city environment and density – small block size (400 sqm or smaller) was specifically mentioned, as were investors and developers as beneficiaries.

Of those who mentioned the council and planning (25), the significant majority expressed concern that town planning was absent, full of loopholes, that dissent was hard to be heard, and the town was lacking proper, protective overlays.

Other issues mentioned were the untidy town entrance and main street, poor quality signage and roads, policing, dogs, and the need for more (and cleared) bike/walking paths.

Question Four: *What would you like 'future Trentham' to look like?*

The 178 respondents to this question were almost totally united in their desire to keep 'future Trentham' looking largely as we know it today (89%), but they expressed their views in slightly differing ways. There were essentially three groups.

One group loved Trentham as it is and wanted future Trentham to look largely as it does today (27%). The second group expected change and were cautious about its effects, using words like 'maintain' 'retain' and 'keep' in relation to holding on to Trentham's look, character, history, ambience, small feel etc. in the face of pressures in the future (38%)

The third group (24%) looked at planning for the future and the development of the town. While accepting some development, they wanted it controlled and not to impair the current feel and amenity – to be planned carefully. This included, for some, upgrading of amenities including walking and bike tracks, and a sustainable, eco-friendly and renewable energy future.

There was a high degree of crossover between the three groups: each expressed concern over future development, in particular the prospect of the town becoming suburban or over developed.

Background to the Survey

Why did we start a survey?

Anecdotally, Trentham's residents are very concerned about the pressures the town is facing, including the amount of subdivision and the threat to its rural ambiance. As local residents with a shared concern for Trentham's future, we (Brian Hood, Vicki Steggall, Penny Campbell and Chris Cau) met in early 2022 to discuss what we could do to ensure that Trentham's future was shaped by the desires of its residents.

During that discussion, we came up with the idea of a survey, as a means to establish people's true feelings about the town, without any suppositions, and to test whether these anecdotal concerns were simply 'a vocal minority' or more widespread. As we found, the concerns are widespread and deeply felt.

Why did we choose these questions?

As residents ourselves, we chose questions that we thought would identify residents' deeper feelings about the town, including what they liked and what they didn't, and what they hoped to see in the future. We wanted to get to the heart of the matter, rather than focus on specific issues, and we spent a long time working on open questions.

What about accuracy?

The raw survey responses are available for viewing at XXXXXXXX

Who can we contact?

Brian Hood

Brian is the local ward councillor and Mayor of Hepburn Shire

Vicki Steggall

Vicki is an historian and writer, and author of eight books.

Steggall@ozemail.com.au 0400 786 173

Ian MacBean

Ian was a member of the Loddon-Campaspe Regional Planning Authority and, more recently, Chair of the North Central Catchment Authority. He is an active Trentham community member and was awarded an OAM 'for services to regional planning and the environment.

glendaandian@gmail.com

Penny and Chris are the editors of Trentham's monthly newspaper,

thetrenthamtrumpet@gmail.com

Ceri Spain

Ceri is an active member of Trentham's community, and an agent at Belle Property. She joined the group to provide advice based on her extensive community experience

ceridwynaspain@gmail.com 0400 619 729

Synopses of Questions 1 – 4 prepared for the Trentham Trumpet.

Question One and Question Two below appeared in the September Trumpet

Question Three and Question Four below appeared in the October Trumpet.

Trentham Trumpet September 2022

QUESTION ONE

Our first question in the Trentham survey was: *What do you like about living in Trentham?*

One hundred and seventy nine people responded, writing over 4,700 words. Their response was clear: community was mentioned 86 times, followed by small (referring to small town and small population) 63 times, and then rural or country feel (57 times). The community was described with words such as friendly, active, supportive, tight knit, small, caring, thoughtful and strong, along with appreciation of the community spirit, community feel and sense of community.

After these, the most commonly used words were tree (43), friendly and people (37 and 38 respectively), historic/old or heritage (32), nature or natural (32), environment (27) and beauty/beautiful (22).

In the next tranche of responses, the key words included peace, space, quiet, walking, air and open-ness.

There was a remarkable unanimity amongst the respondents, mostly tied to the community, smallness, rural feel, and friendliness. People wrote about walking in a peaceful, quiet atmosphere and meeting people they liked. Trentham's small size, harmony with nature and rural feel were critical. Proximity to the forest and appreciation of Trentham's shops and facilities were highly considered, as was proximity to other towns and Melbourne itself.

Many also wrote of the need they felt to protect Trentham's unique character, its community and small, rural feel.

QUESTION TWO

Question two of the survey asked: *What do you like about Trentham's appearance?*

One hundred and seventy four people responded, writing over 3,330 words.

It was clear that people really like Trentham's appearance, and the respondents expressed a strong love for their town. The most strongly liked aspect of Trentham's appearance was its historic nature; the words 'historic/al', 'old', 'traditional' and 'heritage' were used 118 times in total, and they were used in reference to Trentham's streetscapes, its buildings (shops and houses) and general character.

Trentham's trees and gardens were mentioned 75 times (trees 47 – on both public and private land - and gardens 28). The town's open, natural spaces were also appreciated, with the word 'space' (as in open space, sense of space, public space and green space), along with 'parks' and 'reserves' mentioned in total 49 times. Possibly allied with this, but given here separately, were the words 'country' and 'rural', mentioned 37 times.

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The overall sentiment was that the respondents loved the appearance of their town and wanted to write about it: it mattered to them. They particularly liked its historic appearance, along with its trees, open space, reserves and gardens, its shops and rural nature.

Trentham Trumpet October 2022

Last month we published the response to Questions One and Two (What do you like about living in Trentham?) and (What do you like about Trentham's appearance?). Below are the answers to Questions Three and Four.

QUESTION THREE: *Is there anything that displeases or frustrates you about the town's planning or appearance?*

This received the strongest response, with 171 respondents writing almost 7,000 words, many of them quite passionate. One issue stood out: 61% of respondents (105) specifically mentioned the extent of subdivision taking place in Trentham as being the thing that displeased or frustrated them. Subdivision was the most commonly used word; also frequently mentioned were battle-axe blocks, tiny blocks, high density housing, development, expansion of modern estates, and infill.

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There was a high degree of crossover between the three groups: each expressed concern over future development, in particular the prospect of the town becoming suburban or over developed.

Since the Trentham Survey closed in June, we have been analysing the responses. They reveal just strongly people feel about our town: 255 people responded to the survey's multiple choice questions, and 178 continued on to the four questions requiring written responses – producing an astonishing 20,000 words. This means we have a very clear picture of Trentham in 2022 and what its residents want, ready to show the council when they turn their attention to creating a town structure plan for Trentham.