

Darebin Council Elections 2020: Questions for Candidates

23rd September, 2020

Dear Candidate,

Below is a list of questions compiled on behalf of Darebin community groups; Darebin Progress Association, Darebin Residents Group, Save THE Preston Market and Darebin Appropriate Development Association.

The aim is to supply our members answers to question most important them in the hope it will aid their voting choices in the upcoming council election.

We have aimed to keep the impost on your time to a minimum by posing most questions for yes or no answers with some also asking how you might achieve the answer as a Councillor.

Your answers will be posted, unedited, on our websites and Facebook pages for maximum coverage to our members across Darebin.

Please leave a YES or a NO and remove or cross out the answer you don't want.

GENERAL RESPONSE

Name: Jessica Sullivan **Ward:** North Central Ward

Please tell us in 50 words the main reason you are running for Council and your top three issues you want council to adopt

As a long term resident, I have been disappointed with the lack of community consultation and transparency of the current Council. Councillors are voting in factional blocks against the best interests of their constituents. I have no party affiliations, I will to be a truly independent voice for locals.

A back to basics approach: Ensuring Council services such as road/paths maintenance, Aged Care and Disability Support services, Libraries and community spaces, and parklands and recreational areas are properly funded and maintained. As part of the COVID-19 recovery plan infrastructure funding should be increased to help create local jobs, and local services should be expanded to support those affected financially and emotionally by the pandemic.

Sustainable developments: Increasing the developer levy, ensuring adequate green spaces and a minimum Green Star rating be required for new developments. Ensuring that the Preston Market remains in its current location and is protected going forward. Height restrictions to ensure that developments are appropriate for the area, and do not negatively impact the lifestyle and amenities of other locals.

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Protecting our environment: We are blessed to have wonderful parklands in Darebin with a wealth of native flora and fauna. We have a duty to protect biodiversity in Darebin, and this is one area where I feel that the Council has fallen short, by allowing inappropriate developments too close to natural parklands, and failing to maintain existing public green spaces.

GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILTY AND TRANSPARANCY

One of the glaring weaknesses of the majority of current councillors has been their inability/failure to accept that they represent the community. The following questions require a simple yes/no/how answer to demonstrate your commitment to important democratic procedures.

1. Will you support complete transparency in issues affecting the community?

YES	
<p>HOW?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I would maintain an active social media account and share upcoming agendas and highlight when community consultations are open and provide links.2. I would fight to make the Council website and newsletter more 'user-friendly' and ensure that upcoming meeting items and current consultations are front and centre not buried amongst other news.3. I would fight to make the Minutes of Meeting more comprehensive. The Council recently adopted the bare minimum of transparency amendments in August 2020 as they were required to do so by the recent amendments to the Local Government Act (LGA). I believe the Minutes should include any statements and comments made by the Councillors.4. I would fight to make sure recordings of Meetings will be available and remain available for a period of not less than five (5) years.5. I would support a greater community presence at Meetings including allowing a greater amount of time for questions from the public.6. There have been some recent issues brought regarding Councillors failing to disclose conflicts of interest before voting. I would put forward the following motion: Prior to each Meeting, the Councillors in attendance must sign a Declaration in respect of any conflict they may have in respect of the agenda items to be heard, and that that the Declaration be annexed to the Minutes of the Meeting for the public's review.7. A breakdown of Councillor entitlements and reimbursements claimed should be published quarterly in the newsletter.	

2. Would you guarantee regular meetings with the community by all means available?

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YES	
<p>HOW? If elected, I intend to be a 'full-time' Councillor, and will make it my priority to be available to community members and groups at times and places that suit them. In addition to making myself available for one on one discussions in person and on the phone/zoom, I would also host 'drop-in' zoom meetings times at least once a fortnight, which any community member could join, and once lockdown restrictions are lifted, I would love to hold similar sessions at local libraries and community spaces throughout the wards, to make it easier for people who prefer in person chats.</p>	

3. Will you actively consult with community groups prior to any local by-laws being enacted?

YES	
<p>HOW? As stated above, I will do my best to ensure that the community is informed of agenda items and community consultation periods well ahead of time. Further to this, I will actively reach out to community groups who may be stakeholders or be affected by proposed by-laws, and seek their input directly. Naturally, this is subject to the matters not being confidential or sensitive.</p>	

4. Would you restructure Public Question Time to allow questions directly to Councillors?

YES	
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5. Will you support a review of the Council newsletter to make it more informative, regular and representative?

YES and a review of the layout of the website to make sure the homepage is a notice board of important issues and dates	
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6. Will you ensure Advisory Committees recommendations are heard in General Council meetings?

YES	
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7. Will you work for the community and not to serve any political party?

YES	
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8. Will you insist on an annual staff survey and make it available to the community?

YES	
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9. Will you listen to the Community's opinions when motions for spending and approvals for planning are brought before Council?

YES	
HOW? I will actively seek out community opinions on all motions in respect significant spending or major planning approvals. I will note these opinions and table my discussions with the community at the Meetings. I acknowledge that I will inevitably vote for motions that are unpopular or contentious, it would be impossible to please everyone 100% of the time, but I will never be dismissive of the community's concerns. I will be open to frank discussions and I will be upfront about my reasoning behind my votes.	

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Will you oppose the demolition and relocation of the Preston Market elsewhere on the site and actively support its retention?

YES	
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HOW?

The Preston Market is an extremely important part of Darebin and should remain in situ, as it is centrally located near public transport facilities, accommodating both the local community and also wider Melbourne community in almost every direction too.

The Market has been an integral part of Darebin's culture for 50 years, and is also the envy of many other municipalities as well.

If relocated, we not only stand to lose its charm and heritage, but also its accessibility and functionality too. Such a move may compromise the diverse mix of sellers and goods which many in the community rely on as a source of fresh products and goods at affordable prices. As a Councillor I would always vote to support the Market remaining in place and ensuring it provides the same amenities and facilities to the community.

I know some current Councillors have complained that the Market is out of their hands and they don't have the final say etc, but that does not mean they should stop advocating for the community on the issue, they should be petitioning State planning authorities and actively supporting community petitions, including supporting community interests at any VCAT hearings.

2. Will you support mandatory heights limits be applied to the Preston Market site?

YES	
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HOW?

I will support height restrictions not only on the Preston Market development but all new developments to ensure they are appropriate for the area, including the proposed development of the area around Northcote Plaza.

3. Will you oppose the practice of trading off of objectives and standards, such as height limits in the planning scheme that can result in poorer outcomes but gets developments built in Darebin?

YES	
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HOW?

By voting that certain requirements such as height, green spaces, Green Star ratings and minimum parking spaces provided, be made mandatory to preserve the amenity of the area for existing locals. Any exceptions sought should be subject to community consultation to ensure that they do not negatively impact the area.

4. Do you agree to a complete review of the Darebin Planning Scheme including consultation with community groups and members to ensure it is clearer in its intent,

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eg: applies mandatory heights to development plans, better protects neighbourhood character and increases neighbourhood residential zoning?

YES	
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- 5. Will you support the Open Space Levy and Developer Contribution Levy that adequately increases the amount of land dedicated to open space in order to meet the future needs of Darebin's growing population and ensure that the money is spent in the general locale of where the development occurs?**

YES	
HOW? I agree that the bulk of the money should be spent in the immediate location around the development. However, I also think that increased developments can impact other areas too. I would propose a split of the levies to be 75% to be spent in the neighbourhood of the development, 25% into general revenue to support other community services like aged care, waste management, libraries and environmental management. This is because areas where large developments must be blocked to protect native flora and fauna should not suffer financially because of this lack of development. Especially when the parklands in these areas are assessed as part of Darebin's overall green space when justifying further developments in other parts of Darebin.	

- 6. Will you support a review of the Planning Committee Charter to give objectors more time to present their case, to allow at least one councillor to call up planning applications and, release the agenda papers and reports at least seven days ahead of meetings and to allow residents to ask questions and make submissions?**

YES	
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AGED CARE AND DISABILITY SERVICES

- 1. Will you support Council having an ongoing role in the direct delivery of home support care services to eligible older people and people with a disability in Darebin?**

YES	
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- 2. Will you support Council subsidising the cost of home care services to eligible residents?**

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YES	
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3. Will you support Council continuing to directly deliver to eligible older residents and people with a disability the following :

● home support services;	YES	
● personal care,	YES	
● shopping,	YES	
● respite,	YES	
● food services,	YES	
● home care,	YES	
● community transport,	YES	
● home maintenance	YES	

4. Will you oppose further restrictions of eligibility criteria for home care services in Darebin?

YES	
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5. Will you agree to support Council becoming a registered home care provider?

YES	
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6. Will you agree to maintain at least \$6m in council co-funding for age care services and provide open financial reporting of aged care services?

YES	
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I would also like to add that I will strongly defend against these services being outsourced to private providers. If the Council funds these services they should be provided by Council employed staff, when we are putting carers or workers into the homes of vulnerable people we must have full oversight of the situation because we have a duty of care to ensure the support provided is of a high quality for the safety of our residents.

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICES

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1. Will you campaign and vote to provide more public facilities eg; toilet facilities, bins, footpaths upgrade, bike paths, Outdoor Gyms, upgrading parks, and regular removal of graffiti and litter in Darebin?

YES	
HOW? By properly funding these services and employing more cleaning and maintenance staff.	
Public Facilities I support more public toilets and more bins. I will make sure they are not just installed and abandoned, the Council needs to employ more staff for maintenance of these facilities. I loved (pre-covid) using the outdoor gym at Edwardes Lake Park and would love to see more parks upgraded to include these facilities. I also think there needs to be an increase in public seating, not just around shopping strips but within parks and suburban streets . This would provide ‘break’ spots for older people, and people with mobility issues, out on walks helping them to get more exercise safely.	
Roads, bike paths and footpaths. The network of bike paths in Darebin needs to be expanded in a sensible way so that they link together to allow users to get to key points of interest safely, at the moment paths terminate and riders are forced onto the road or footpaths that are not designed to be shared. There are significant issues with the quality of roads and footpaths around many of Darebin’s suburbs. When residents report issues such as cracked paths or potholes, they need to be repaired swiftly and properly. Often the asphalt patch on a broken path creates a tripping hazard itself. The quality of the footpaths around Darebin need to be improved to make them safer for pedestrians, and easier to use for people with mobility aids such as wheelchairs.	
Graffiti and Litter I would support a trial of providing graffiti kits to regularly impacted businesses and residents, so that graffiti can be removed immediately. As well as an online ‘hotline’ where residents can report graffiti locations and upload photos, to help keep track of repeat offenders. I would support employing artists to paint murals on large public walls/structures that are regularly targeted to dissuade tagging. Increasing public bins will make a great headway in reducing street litter, but unfortunately there will always be lazy people that will drop a bottle 2 feet from a bin. More maintenance and cleaning staff should be employed to remove graffiti and pick up litter, especially in our parks and around our waterways.	

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2. Will you vote for balanced services and equal spend across all of Darebin, particularly Reservoir, including rebuilding to the Reservoir Leisure Centre?

YES	
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3. Will you oppose unsubstantiated use of money spent on consultants?

YES	
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Further, when consultants are needed there should be a clear transparent tender process for their services, and the public should be provided with the details of the consultants chosen with a background as to why they have the relevant expertise. I note that the ‘consultant’ that charged a small fortune to prepare the recommendations for the Great Parking Debacle primary experience was in preparing reports for cycling lobbies, not in urban planning or parking.

4. Will you vote for more parking and vote against blanket parking restrictions?

YES	
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In particular, we need more Disabled Permit spots, and Darebin should adopt City of Yarra and City of Melbourne’s policy of allowing people with Disabled Permits to park for free in metered parking spots for the time allotted to that spot.

5. Will you support Council in making publicly available more detailed financial reporting on departmental, program and project expenditure?

YES	
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● ENVIRONMENT

1. Given that we are in a climate emergency and everyone; individuals, corporations and all three levels of government must be part of mitigation and adaptation, are you prepared to commit to strong action on global warming?

YES	
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HOW?

- Imposing Green Star rating requirements on new developments;
- Transitioning the Council fleet to electric vehicles;
- Providing more electric vehicle charging stations;
- Preventing developments close to areas that are earmarked for 'rewilding';
- Providing grants to businesses to assist them with 'going green' initiatives that are relevant to their industry; and
- Expanding the subsidised solar program in particular extending it to strata properties such as unit blocks and apartments.

2. Will you bring policies to Council that will make a real improvement at a local level to Darebin's environment and biodiversity?

YES

HOW? (please provide examples)

- Support and expand re-wilding plans;
- Clean up our parks and waters, in particular ensuring that trash and waste is removed promptly;
- Supporting a study into cleaning up the water at Edwardes Lake Park not just for water sports but to make it healthier for waterbirds, fish and other fauna;
- Trial subsidising beekeeping starter kits, similar to the subsidised compost products program we already have;
- Pledge support the community interests by petitioning the State and Federal Governments for Climate Action.

3. Darebin Council set up both Climate Emergency Darebin and the Darebin Nature Trust as key initiatives very early in their term. What do you know about these two entities and their specific achievements?

Not much prior to this question, information is very hard to find on their KPIs and they are not well advertised, compared to community run initiatives. I have now read the May 2020 Terms of Reference.

4. Have they been effective?

NO

In order to share this information to voters please return your responses to the sender in a Word, PDF or JPEG document by the 30th September 2020.

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Thank you.

On behalf of:

Darebin Progress

Association: <https://www.facebook.com/Darebin-Progress-Association-163813440325401/>

Save THE Preston Market Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/4553059228098235/>

Darebin Appropriate Development Association: <https://www.darebinada.org/> and

Darebin Residents Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/695607447257408>