

Launceston Building Height & Massing Study Community Consultation Report

25th October 2018

1. Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the significant contributions to the Launceston Building Heights and Massing Study Community Consultation by the following:

- Paul Davies Pty Ltd, for writing the study report and hosting information sessions
- The community, for engaging with the consultation program and providing feedback
- City Development Department staff, City of Launceston for support and assistance with the consultation program
- Communications Department staff, City of Launceston for support and assistance with the consultation program.

Report prepared by:

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2. Executive Summary

City of Launceston, commissioned Paul Davies Pty Ltd to write the Launceston Building Height and Massing Study, a study report analysing existing local context in terms of height and providing potential options to facilitate suitable development in Launceston. This document summarises the community responses within a 6-week public consultation process.

There were several points that were highlighted and reiterated during the consultations, and they are:

- The need to retain the unique character of Launceston;
- The desire for design excellence in building proposals;
- The value of heritage buildings within the CBD;
- The desire for an absolute building height to provide certainty; and
- The concern about development that is out of character with existing context.

Following the study, further work by the City of Launceston will commence including:

- To determine a set of key development objectives and aspirations resulting from the consultation;
- To consider and implement appropriate assessment methodologies to achieve better design outcomes (excellence);
- To develop and revise relevant planning scheme provisions;
- To determine a process for developments that chose to exceed the maximum building height; and

- To develop a set of development guidelines which underpin the Planning Scheme and to assist with future development.

3. Introduction

The overriding quality of Launceston historically is the very fine quality of low-rise buildings and human scale built form. In recent years, the community has expressed considerable concern about the appropriateness of new development. Proposals that are perceived to be out of scale or to negatively impact on streetscapes have been subject to objections and appeals. These contested developments are costly in terms of time and money for the developer and can be divisive for the community for many reasons.

Based on recent trends and a broader interest in Tasmania (affordability and offering), it is anticipated that over the coming years the City of Launceston will be required to facilitate and determine a number of development proposals for taller buildings. Much of the controversy comes from the generic nature of the planning provisions and the degree to which subjectivity is required in order to assess the appropriateness of proposals.

The Council has commissioned a report to analyse existing context and provide a starting point for a conversation about what is considered appropriate development in Launceston. The resultant building heights and massing study was completed in July 2018.

Following this, the Council arranged for a community consultation period during August and September 2018 to provide the community and stakeholders an opportunity to respond to the report. The findings of this community consultation are presented in this document. This information will be used to provide an accompanying report, guidelines and the preparation of new planning provisions in the Tasmanian State-wide Planning Scheme.

Building height is one piece of a puzzle. The engagement process provided the City of Launceston and the broader Community a great opportunity to share and discuss what is important to Launceston in regards to future development.

4. Purpose

This report records the findings of the community consultation conducted for the Launceston Building Heights and Massing Study. Consultation commenced on the 31 July and was then extended to 14 September 2018.

5. Consultation Approach

A communication strategy was developed with assistance from Council's communication staff. The strategy included a range of consultation methods to capture a broad range of respondents based on local demographics. It also identified important stakeholders such as design professionals, developers and government agencies to be invited to take part in the consultation.

6. Consultation program

The Community was notified of the consultation program using a variety of methods including:

- Advertisements in newspapers and via radio;
- Online information and survey on Your Voice Your Launceston web page (YVYL);
- Emailing list providing links to the survey;
- Advertising using Council's social media platforms, including targeted promotion methods; and
- Directed invitations to participate in focus groups.

Table 1: Summary of consultation program

Event/Method	Approach	Outcome
Stakeholder and public forums	A series of forums were organised to present the building heights study and provide the opportunity for comments.	The events were well attended and many points of concern were raised. There was some confusion about the nature of the consultation which will need to be addressed prior to future consultations.
Individual responses	During the consultation period the public was advised of the opportunity to email individual responses to the planning department for consideration.	14 individual responses were received.
Survey	<p>A survey was prepared to collect information regarding the community's response to the building height study.</p> <p>Hardcopy surveys were distributed at the forums, and available at the Council's Customer Service Centre.</p> <p>The survey was also available online on the Your Voice Your Launceston web page.</p>	<p>A total of 116 surveys were returned:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 111 surveys were completed online via Your Voice Your Launceston • 6 surveys were completed using hard copies

7. Report methodology

The consultation responses raised a diverse range of comments and concerns, recorded in a variety of ways for the different consultation methods as indicated above. The responses have been analysed using coding techniques to identify key themes and ideas raised by the community.

Sections 8 to 10 present an analysis of the responses collected during the forums and from surveys and emails.

The words used below are an interpretation of the responses from the community. Deciding on actions and solutions responding to the issues identified is part of the work involved in revising the Launceston Building Heights and Massing Study and designing the planning scheme standards and building development controls (guidelines).

8. Forums

There were several forum/workshops hosted and presented by Paul Davies and the City of Launceston, to present the building heights study report and provide opportunities for feedback. Each forum was arranged to target a specific stakeholder group, with an additional public forum. The forums were as follows:

- City Prom, Chamber of Commerce and Northern Tasmanian Development Corporation Ltd. (NTDC);
- Local Design Professionals;
- UTAS School of Architecture;
- Local Planning Professionals;
- Co-ordinator General, property Council and REIT;
- Launceston Heritage Advisory Committee; and
- Public Evening Session

The forums/workshops were held from Wednesday the 22nd of August until Friday the 24th of August 2018. At each session, Paul Davies provided on average a 60 minute presentation on the report. This was followed by 30 minutes for questions and commentary.

Comments on the report itself were positive. A common concern was that the report focused on height as opposed to a broader discussion on design excellence. While this was due to the project brief, future communication should indicate how the proposed building heights will work in conjunction with existing planning provisions to ensure appropriate design of a proposal as a whole. There were also suggestions for a design panel or committee to assess applications for design excellence.

It is worth noting that an external design panel would not provide any statutory merit under the current state-wide Planning Scheme process and may have an adverse impact to development timeframes etc. More discussion around this will be required moving forward.

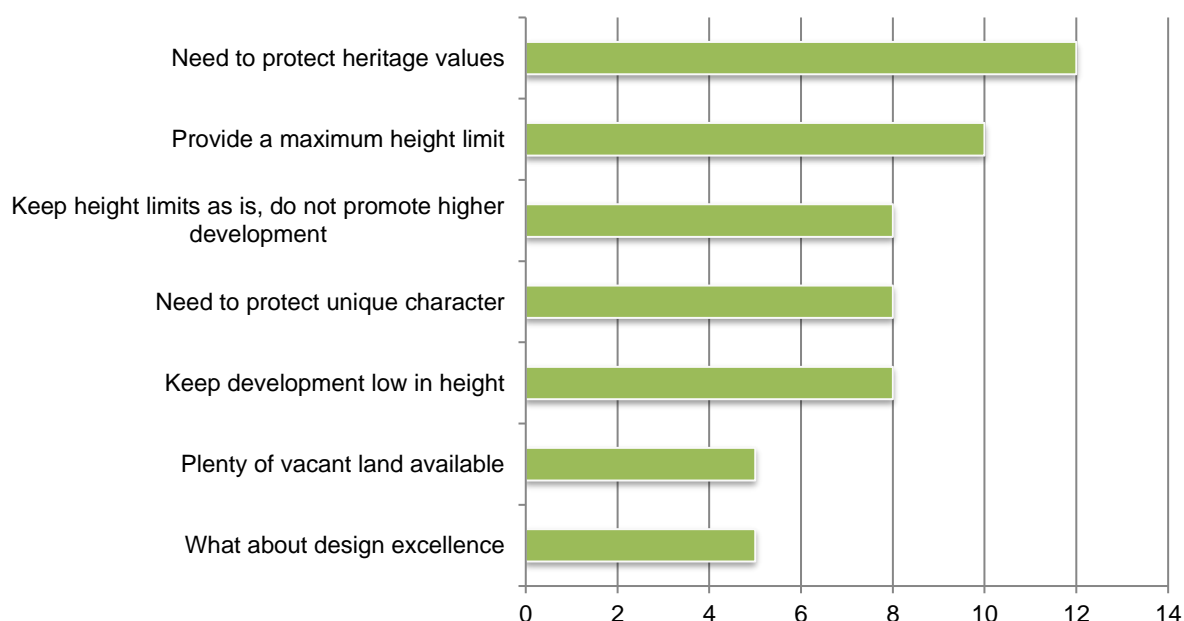
It is noted that there were some concerns with limited amount of time between the invitations being sent out and the sessions being held. This was rectified by extending the consultation by two (2) additional weeks. For future consultation this will be taken into consideration.

9. Individual Responses

During the consultation period, it was published that along with responding to the online survey, the community provided individual responses via email or mail. 14 responses were received. The main comments in the letters referred to the need to protect heritage values, the desire for an absolute height limit and protecting the existing character of development. Several responses referred to keeping height limits as is and not allowing height limits to increase.

This indicates confusion as the existing situation regarding height limits and the proposed changes, as currently there is not an absolute height limit. Future consultation will need to ensure that the current and proposed situations are clearly defined.

Figure 2: Top comments included in the individual letters received.



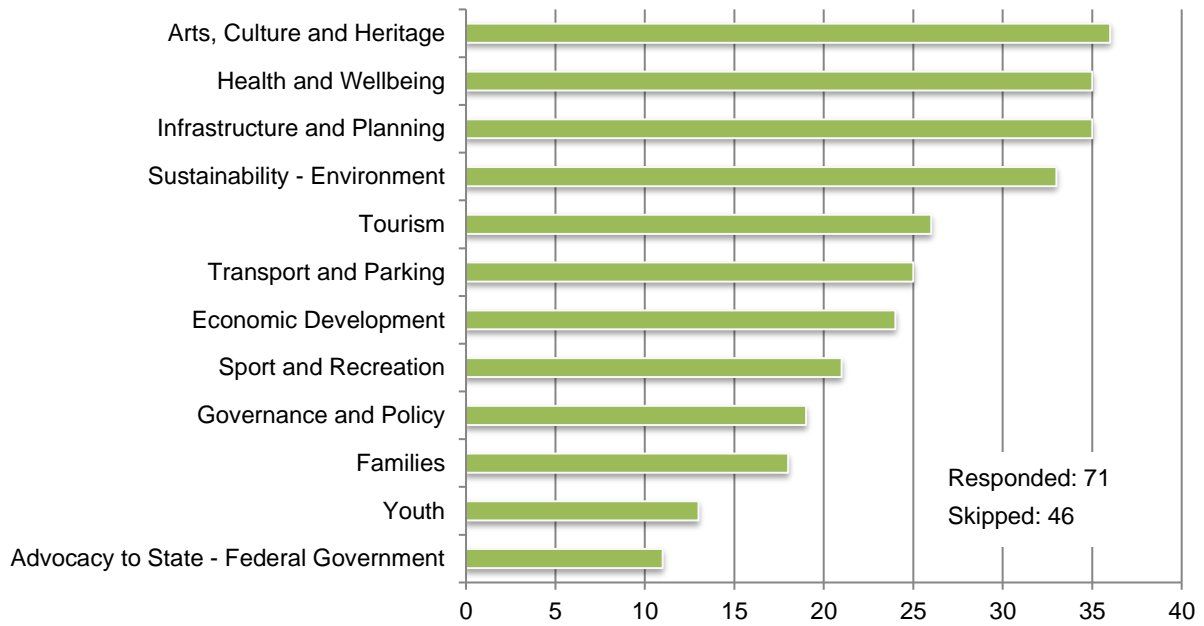
10. Survey

As discussed in table 1, a total of 117 surveys were returned. 111 were submitted online and 6 were submitted in hardcopy.

There were a total of 1,125 visits to the online survey, and the report and appendixes were downloaded 288 times.

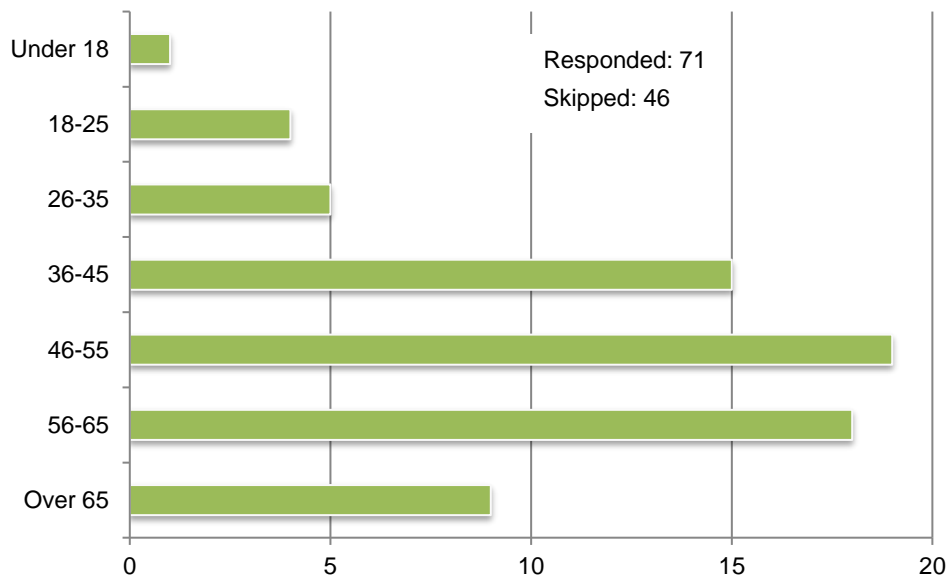
The majority of the visits were in the first and fourth week and via a direct link to Your Voice Your Launceston.

Figure 3: Responses to the query "Please indicate if you have an interest or expertise in any of the following:"



The respondents had a wide variety of interests and areas of expertise. The most common indicated interest was in Arts, Culture and Heritage, which can be seen through the response provided. The majority of respondents were between 36 to 65 years of age.

Figure 4: Responses to the query "Please indicate your age."



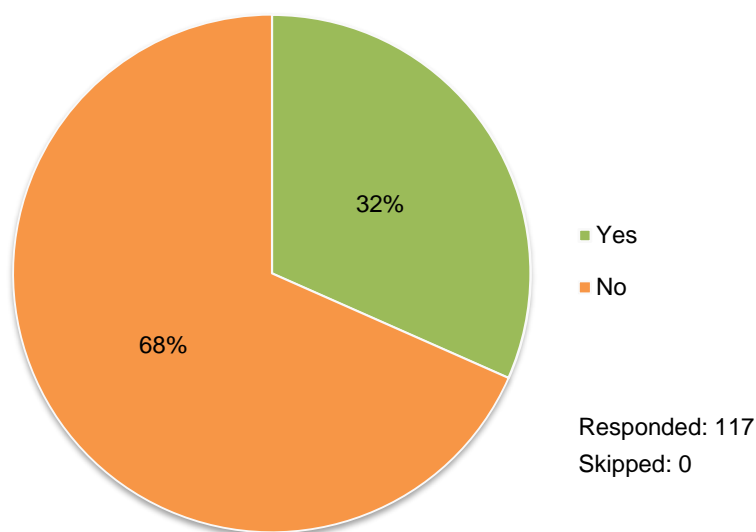
The responses to the survey are grouped based on the focus of the questions asked.

10.1 Planning Scheme Amendment

The majority of respondents (80) did not think a development should be allowed to go higher in special circumstances via a planning scheme amendment. Comments at the end of the survey indicated concerns that a proposal that went through a planning scheme amendment would be similar to the process for the Telstra building and would not involve community consultation.

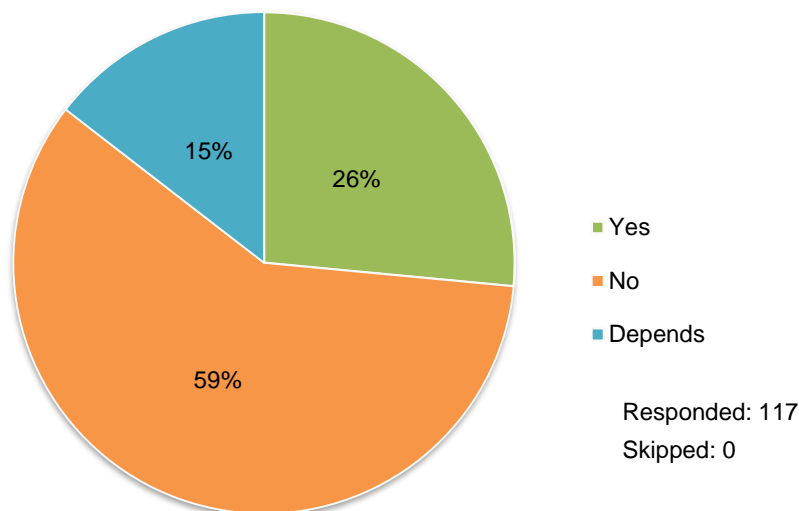
Future consultations should expand on the different planning pathways that are currently available and how they operate in regards to community consultation.

Figure 5: Responses to the query "Do you think a development should be allowed to go higher in special circumstances if they are successful in applying for a Planning Scheme Amendment?"



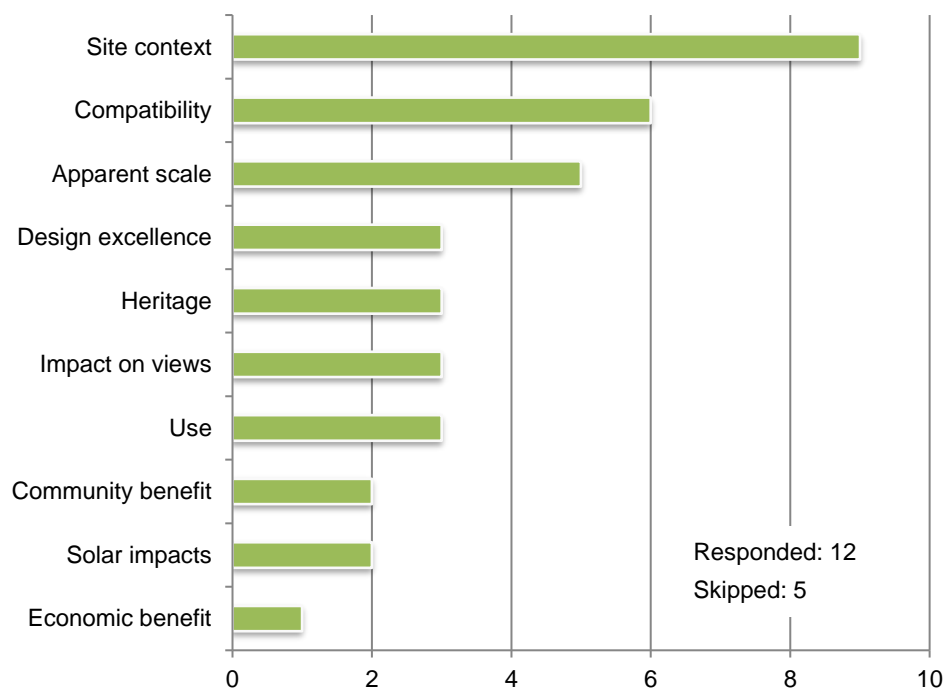
10.2 Tall Buildings

Figure 6: Responses to the query "Do you support taller buildings in Launceston?"



Over half of the respondents (69) did not support taller buildings in Launceston. Of the 15% (17 respondents) that stated that it depended on additional factors, half referred to the surrounding site context. Compatibility of the proposal with neighbouring properties and the apparent scale of the building were also considered important factors.

Figure 7: Responses to the query "Please advise how it depends on the location to support taller buildings?"

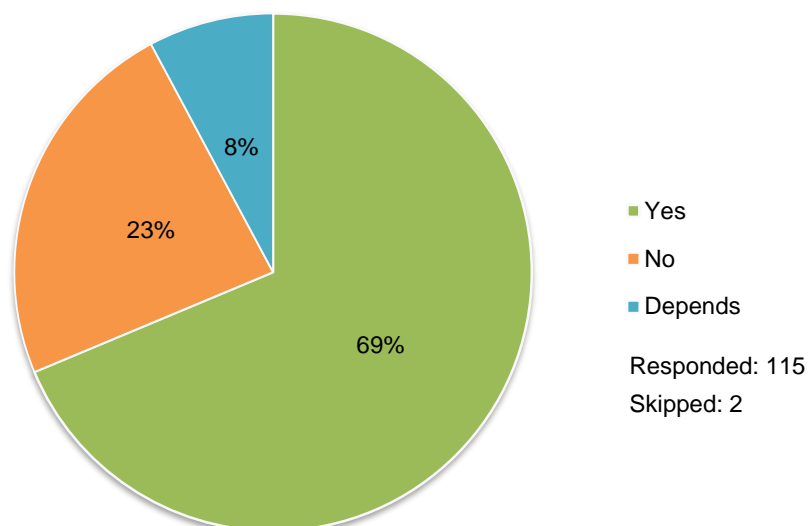


10.3 Absolute Height Limit

The majority of respondents (79) stated that they think there should be an absolute height limit in the CBD. When comparing the responses to this question in comparison to following questions and comments received during the consultation period, there appears to be confusion about the difference between an acceptable solution height limit and a maximum height limit.

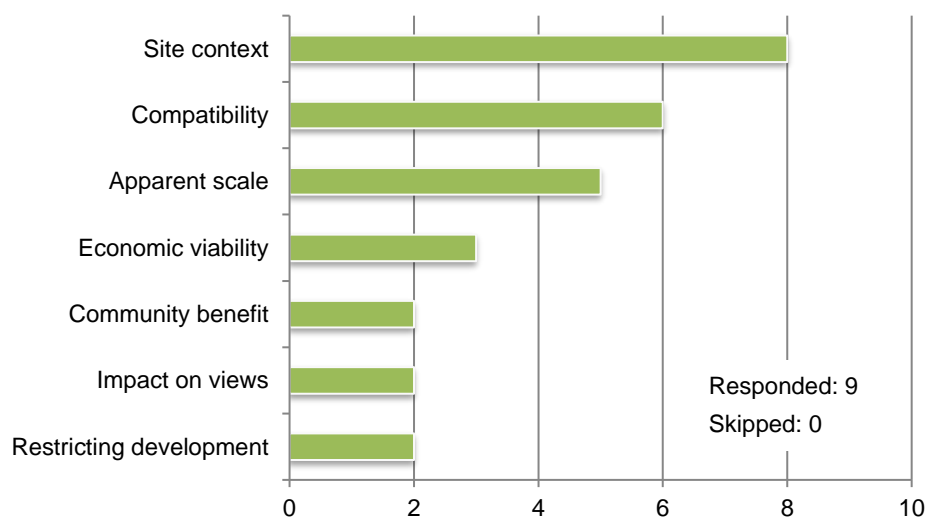
While it was discussed in the report, in future it may be beneficial for the definitions to be readily accessible to the community to ensure that all involved are working within the same assumptions.

Figure 8: Responses to the query "Do you think there should be an absolute height limit in the CBD?"



Of the 8% (9 respondents) that stated that it depended on additional factors, the majority referred to the surrounding site context. Once again, compatibility and the apparent scale of the proposal were also considered important factors.

Figure 9: Responses to the query "Please advise how it depends on the location for an absolute height limit?"

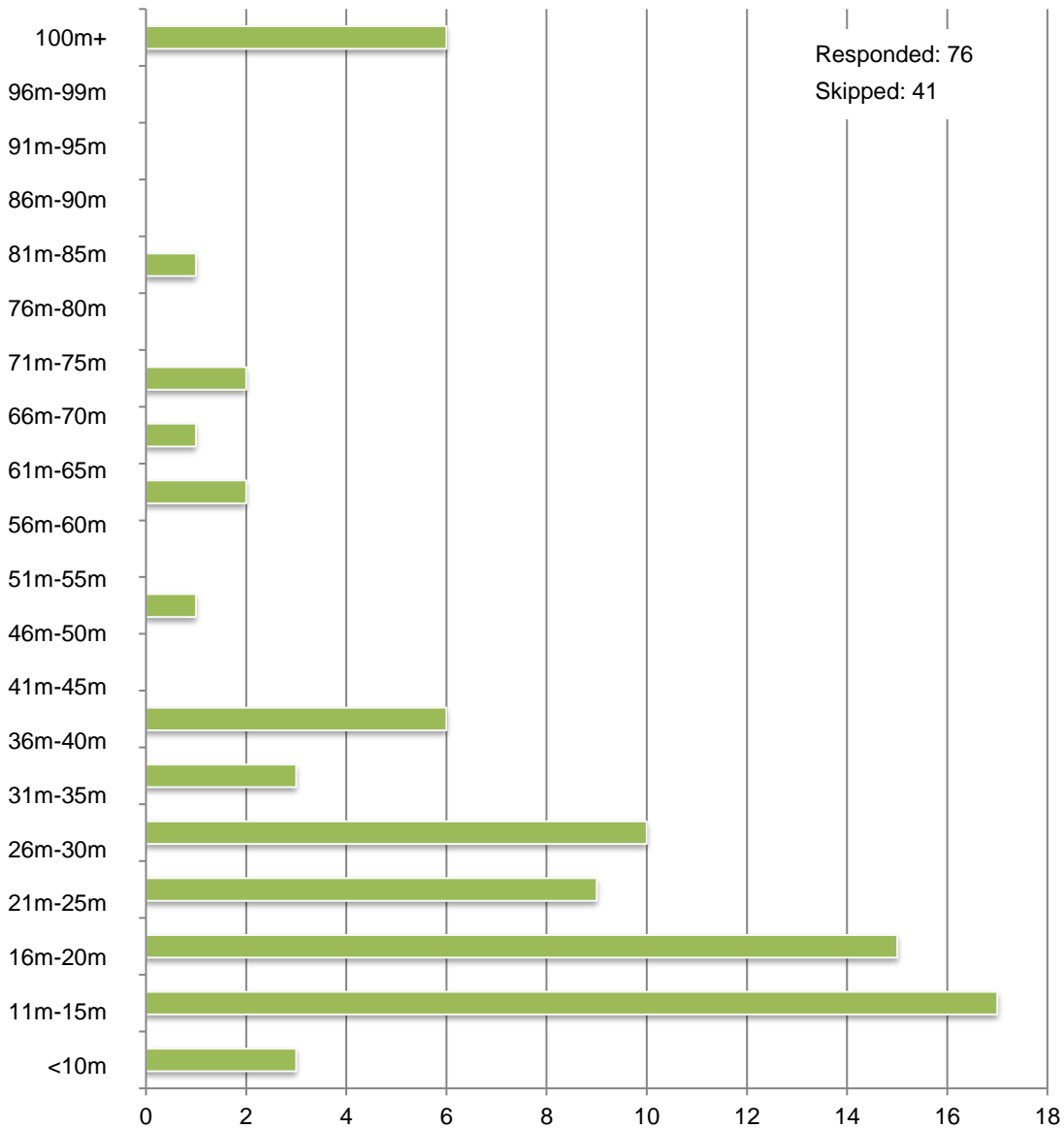


The most common proposed maximum building height was between 10m to 15m (17 respondents). Given that the current acceptable solution in the Central Business zone is 14.5m, it is considered possible that answers may have been affected by confusion over whether the question was related to the acceptable solution height limit or absolute height limit.

It is noted that the majority of responses (66%) are situated within a height limit of 11m to 30m. Existing acceptable solution heights and the proposed absolute height limits in the study are within this range, as the majority of existing development. A few responses (8%) suggested maximum building heights over 100m.

It should be noted that does not mean that the respondents approve of development at this height; rather based on previous responses they do not support an absolute height limit.

Figure 10: Responses to the query "Given the Telstra building in St John Street is approximately 40m high, how high (in metres) should we allow future developments in Launceston?"

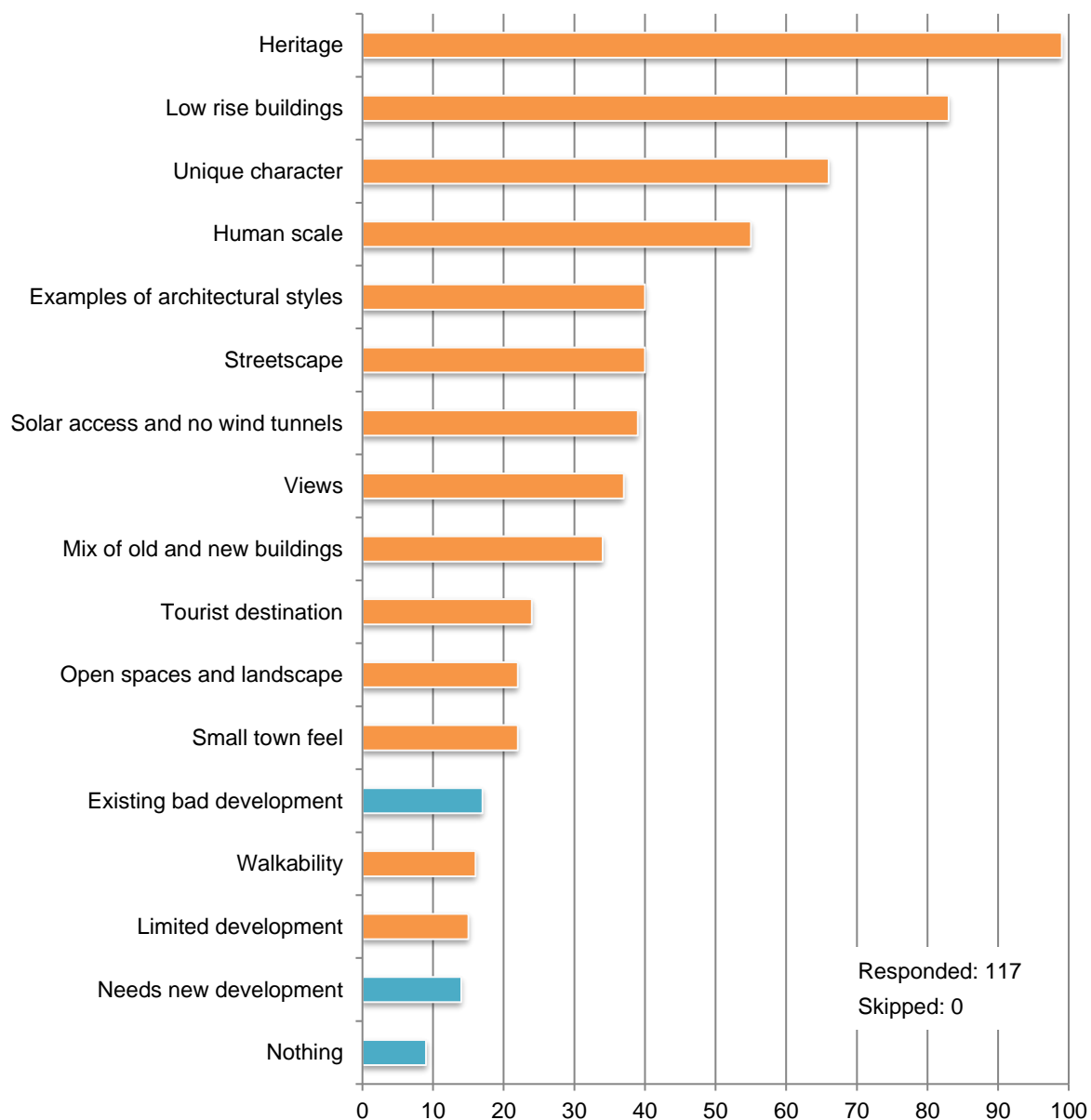


10.4 Existing Built Form

When asked about what the community valued most about Launceston's built form, the majority of respondents listed the large number of heritage buildings in the CBD (99), closely followed by low rise development (84).

Launceston's unique character (66 respondents) and the human scale of development (55 respondents) were also commonly mentioned. A few responses stated things they disliked about Launceston, with most referring to existing bad development (17 respondents). The Telstra building was mentioned several times as an example of bad development.

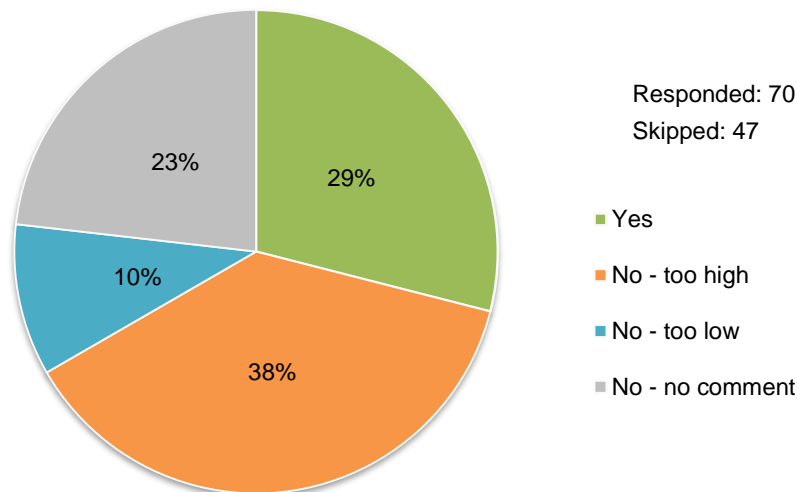
Figure 11: Responses to the query "What do you value most about Launceston's built form?"



10.5 Precinct A

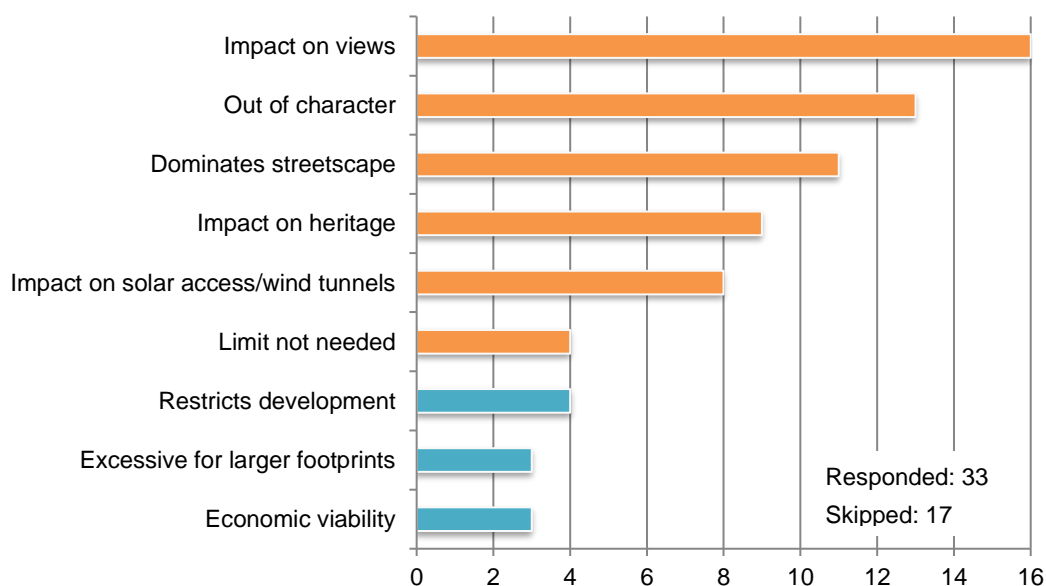
A quarter of respondents agreed with the proposed limits for Precinct A. Of the 71% of respondents that disagreed with the proposed limits, half (26 respondents) indicated that the limits were too high.

Figure 12: Responses to the query "Do you agree with the proposed limits for Precinct A?"



The most common reasons for stating the proposed limits were too high in Precinct A was that there would be a negative impact on existing views into and around the CBD (16 respondents) and that proposed development would be out of character with existing buildings (13 respondents). The potential to dominate the streetscape and negative impact on heritage were also considered. Of the 7 respondents who stated that the height limits were too low, the primary concern was restricting potential development and whether the limit was needed.

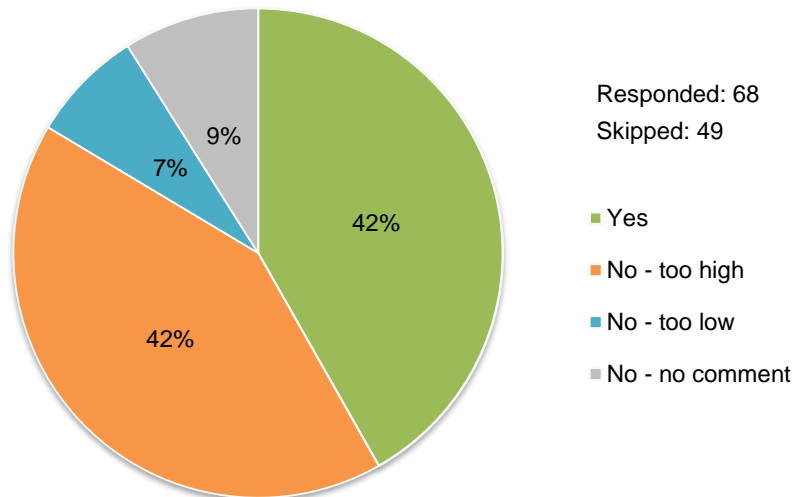
Figure 13: Responses to the query "Please comment on what you disagree with and why for Precinct A?"



10.6 Precinct B

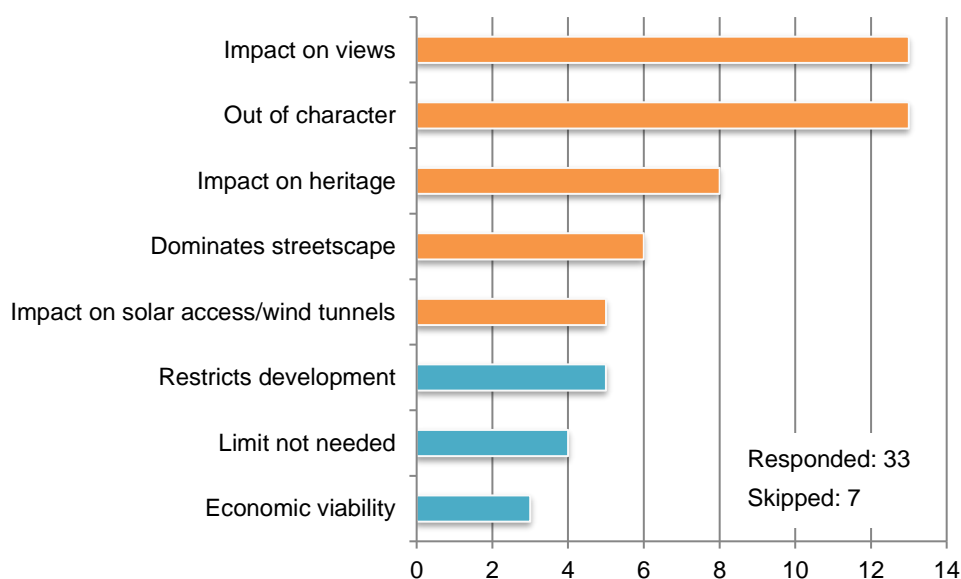
28 respondents agreed with the proposed limits for Precinct A. Of the 58% respondents that disagreed with the proposed limits, 70% (28 respondents) indicated that the limits were too high.

Figure 14: Responses to the query "Do you agree with the proposed limits for Precinct B?"



The most common reasons for stating the proposed limits were too high in Precinct B was potential negative impact on existing views (13 respondents) and that proposed development would be out of character with existing buildings (13 respondents). Of the 5 respondents who stated that the height limits were too low, all were concerned about the height limit restricting potential development.

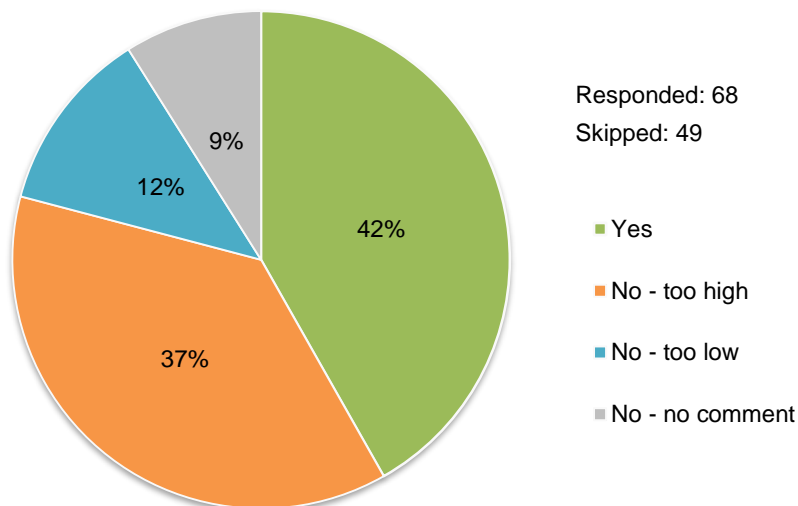
Figure 15: Responses to the query "Please comment on what you disagree with and why for Precinct B?"



10.7 Precinct C

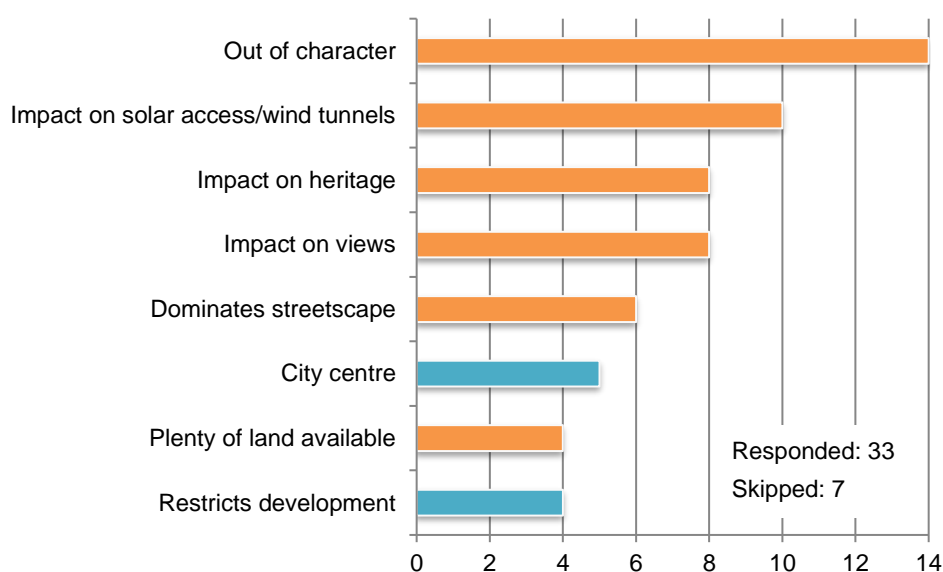
42% of respondents agreed with the proposed limits for Precinct A. Of the 58% of respondents that disagreed with the proposed limits, 62% indicated that the limits were too high.

Figure 16: Responses to the query "Do you agree with the proposed limits for Precinct C?"



The most common reasons for stating the proposed limits were too high in Precinct C was that proposed development would be out of character with existing buildings (14 respondents) and the potential impact on solar access (10 respondents). The potential negative impact on views and heritage were also considered. Of the 8 respondents who stated that the height limits were too low, most stated that the city centre should contain higher buildings than the surrounding precincts.

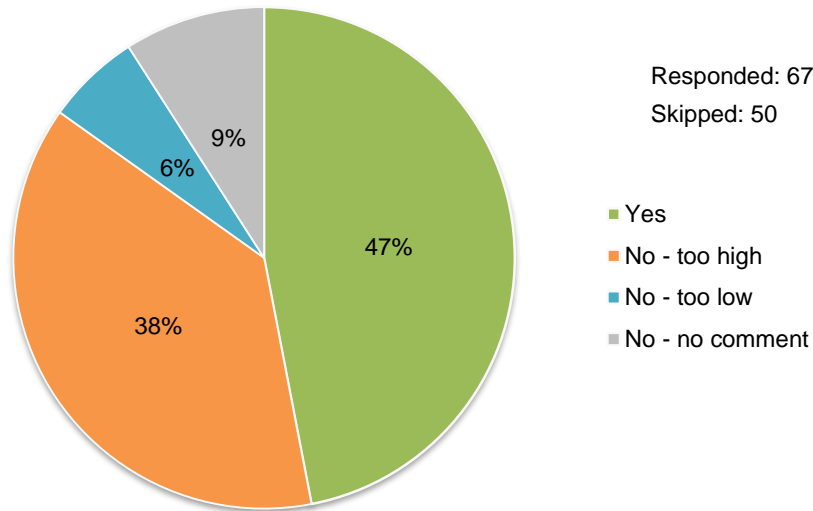
Figure 17: Responses to the query "Please comment on what you disagree with and why for Precinct C?"



10.8 Precinct D

Nearly half of respondents agreed with the proposed limits for Precinct A. Of the 36 respondents that disagreed with the proposed limits, 25 indicated that the limits were too high.

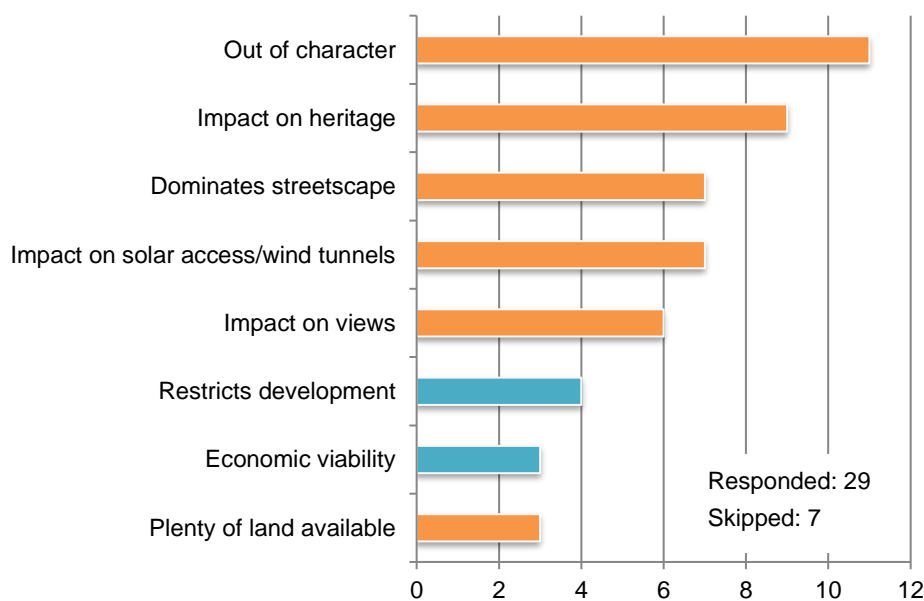
Figure 18: Responses to the query "Do you agree with the proposed limits for Precinct D?"



The most common reasons for stating the proposed limits were too high in Precinct C was that proposed development would be out of character with existing buildings (11 respondents) and the potential negative impact on existing heritage (9 respondents).

The potential impact on solar access and the streetscape were also considered. Of the 4 respondents who stated that the height limits were too low, all were concerned about the height limit restricting potential development.

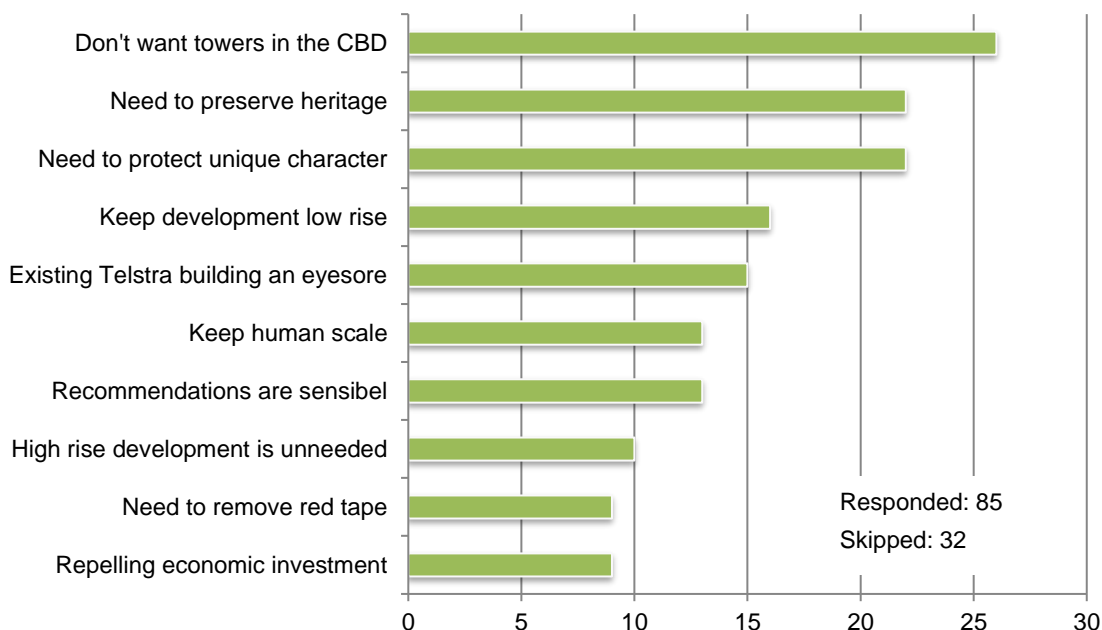
Figure 19: Responses to the query "Please comment on what you disagree with and why for Precinct D?"



10.9 Additional Comments

The most common comments provided were that the respondent did not want towers or tall buildings in the CBD and indicated the importance of protecting Launceston's unique character and heritage buildings.

Figure 20: Top ten most common additional comments regarding building heights in Launceston.



10. Next Steps?

The next step is to provide an accompanying report to the study in response to the consultation. This report will outline key objective and recommendations.

Further workshop/briefings with the newly elected Council be required. From there, a recommendation report, consultation report and study report will seek endorsement in the New Year.

The next body of work for the City of Launceston will consider the following:

- To determine a set of key development objectives and aspirations resulting from the consultation;
- To consider and implement appropriate assessment methodologies to achieve better design outcomes (excellence);
- To develop and revise relevant planning scheme provisions;
- To determine a process for developments that chose to exceed the maximum building height; and
- To develop a set of development guidelines which underpin the Planning Scheme and to assist with future development.

11. Conclusion

This consultation report provides a collation of the material and input provided by the community during the consultation program.

The views of the community will form an important reference for the refinement of the Launceston Building Heights and Massing Study and to assist with the next stage of work.

Further consultation regarding the planning provisions and development controls proposed will occur to test the concepts with the community before it is finalised.

APPENDIX 1

TERMINOLOGY

Building Envelope - the three-dimensional space within which buildings are to occur.

Building Footprint - the area of land enclosed by the external walls of a building, measured at finished ground level.

Building Height - the vertical distance from natural ground level at any point to the uppermost part of a building directly above that point, excluding minor protrusions such as aerials, antennae, solar panels, chimneys and vents.

Character - the particular combination of qualities in a person or place (Cambridge English Dictionary)

Planning Scheme - regulates the way land can be used or developed. It sets out the overall approach to planning in each council's area and the specific requirements or standards for the use, development and protection of land.

Setback - the distance from any lot boundary to a building on the lot.

SAP (Special Area Plan) - is in place for areas that have a unique character that is desirable to be maintained, is encumbered by a Development, Local Area or Master Plan or has specific use or development requirements that are over and above the Zone or Code provisions of a Planning Scheme.

Site Coverage - the proportion of a site (excluding any access strip) covered by roofed buildings.

Streetscape - a view or scene of streets, especially in a city (Oxford and Collins English Dictionaries).

TPC - Tasmanian Planning Commission