Case Studies Series 2023



Case Study: Melrose Park Community Development Project



Melrose Park Community Group

Highlights at a glance

- In 2016, PAYCE and Sekisui House engaged BROOKS Community Engagement (BROOKS) to facilitate the transformation of the Melrose Park community from a high industrial area into one of Sydney's largest urban renewals.
- The Melrose Park community has become a more connected, vibrant place to live through our Community Development project with PAYCE and Sekisui House.
- The project's main objectives were:
 - To provide multiple communication touchpoints between the developer and the community, allowing the BROOKS engagement team to inform and consult with the community consistently
 - To strengthen a sense of community and belonging within Melrose Park through a culmination of meetings, community events, initiatives and sponsorships. By weaving together an intricate tapestry of stakeholder relationships within the Melrose Park community, BROOKS facilitated opportunities for the community to collaborate with each other and the developer to deliver highly successful local events and initiatives for the community.

Three key outcomes showing impact of engagement:

- 1) Fostering a sense of trust and collaboration with key stakeholders Through developing a strong working relationship with the community, BROOKS fostered a sense of trust and cooperation, resulting in a streamlined development process. By engaging in frequent and transparent communication with the community, BROOKS was able to address concerns and mitigate potential issues, resulting in no delays in the DA approval process.
- 2) Established opportunities for regular involvement and input from the community BROOKS facilitators ensured regular on-site presence at Melrose Park to be available for the community to provide their feedback or concerns. They established an open-door policy, encouraging community members to share their thoughts and opinions. BROOKS also continuously followed up with community members to continue engagement into the future, ensuring that we addressed their concerns and, where possible, provided solutions.
- 3) Enhancing PAYCE's goodwill and social capital in the Melrose Park community Through working collaboratively with the community and proactively seeking opportunities to align the community's needs with PAYCE's goals, BROOKS has facilitated the enhancement of PAYCE's goodwill and social capital in the Melrose Park community. Through programs and initiatives such as the Kick Start Cafe and Meal Share program, BROOKS has bolstered PAYCE's reputation as a socially responsible and community-focused developer. This has resulted in a smooth DA application process with minimal delays.

Three key engagement takeaways:

- 1) Proactive approach Being approachable and present with the community shows genuine commitment. High levels of trust and positive relationships are built by being readily available to the community to listen to any community concerns or queries.
- 2) The power of connection The community can achieve a great deal when it works together. By collaborating with community groups and residents, the community was invited to join the process of developing a vibrant community alongside the developer.
- 3) Actively seeking opportunities for further engagement Rather than viewing community
 concerns as a threat to success, the BROOKS engagement team utilised these opportunities to
 further engage with the community, building trust and positive relationships through listening and
 working to understand their needs.

Key search words: Sector and industry, engagement objective, main engagement method, spectrum level *Private, property, community connection, building stakeholder networks, inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower*

1.0 Objectives

Organisation: BROOKS Community

Engagement; PAYCE Consolidated Pty Ltd

and Sekisui House Holdings Pty Ltd

Sector: Private **Industry:** Property

Location: As the Melrose Park urban renewal is located within the Parramatta LGA and borders the neighbouring Ryde LGA, community engagement has been implemented in Melrose Park, Ermington, Rydalmere, West Ryde and Meadowbank.







Southern and Northern Precincts

In 2016, BROOKS Community Engagement was engaged on behalf of PAYCE and Sekisui to design, implement and deliver a grassroots community engagement and development strategy for the residents and broader community of Melrose Park.



BROOKS was engaged to assist PAYCE in managing the inevitable challenges arising from significant changes in an area and to help strengthen a sense of a community with a lively and welcoming nature. PAYCE partnered with Sekisui House Australia to develop a new \$700 million retail and residential site, Melrose Central. The urban renewal project would include around 5,000 new apartments, a town centre and retail village, community amenities and significant parklands.

The large-scale nature of the development was bound to raise several concerns for residents as it would result in significant changes in the area. By starting the engagement before the DA approval process and construction began, BROOKS sought to get on the front foot of telling the story about PAYCE before people's assumptions and preconceived notions about developers gained traction in the community. Further, by providing regular project updates and establishing a robust on-site presence, BROOKS prevented the spread of misinformation by ensuring the community had access to accurate and up-to-date information about the project. Finally, by actively listening and building genuine relationships with the community, BROOKS ensured that residents felt heard during the process and addressed their concerns.



Melrose Park Urban Renewal

Engagement objectives:

- Foster open and transparent communication between BROOKS, PAYCE and the Melrose Park community to build trust and address concerns
- Create opportunities for ongoing community input and feedback throughout the project's planning and implementation phases
- Identify and address potential social, economic and environmental impacts of the urban renewal project on the community
- **Facilitate** connection between the community and the project team to deliver a smooth process throughout the planning and development stages
- Establish measures to mitigate construction-related disturbances and minimise disruption to the community during the project
- Build social connections between community stakeholders to form strong working relationships for the future of the Melrose Park community
- Partner with community groups to run events and programs to bring the local community together to build a stronger sense of belonging to the Melrose Park urban renewal
- Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the engagement process to continuously improve community relations and project implementation
- **Encourage** and advise the decision-maker (PAYCE) to further partake in community initiatives and become an active member and supporter of the Melrose Park community.

Scope:

The six fundamental pillars of the Melrose Park Community Engagement Framework were designed to build a strong sense of connection in Melrose Park, with a view to informing, including and engaging residents, stakeholders and the wider community in the Melrose Park urban renewal project.

Spectrum level:

The Melrose Park community primarily played an advisory role within the community development, providing BROOKS with input on different events, initiatives and programs to develop the Melrose Park community and help people feel more connected and welcomed.

INFORM:	BROOKS maintained consistent information to ensure a continuous flow of accurate and up-to-date information to stakeholders: • Village Talk • Dedicated phone line and email • Community website • Social media sites – Facebook • Letterbox leaflets.
CONSULT:	One-on-one meetings were held with key stakeholders to develop a deeper understanding of the Melrose Park community's needs and concerns about the development: • Over 25+ community groups and over 200 local residents have been engaged and connected with.
INVOLVE:	Regular formal consultation group meetings have been held with local residents and community groups to provide updates about the development, listen to suggestions and feedback, and address local concerns. This provided numerous opportunities for stakeholders to engage in discussions, express their opinions, and actively participate in the decision-making process: • Traffic Safety Advisory Committee • Melrose Park Residents Action Group • Melrose Park Community Group • Melrose Park Public School P&C.
COLLABORATE:	By developing positive working relationships with key stakeholders in the Melrose Park community, BROOKS has facilitated a stronger sense of community by connecting community groups and leaders with each other: • Community Golf Day

	Meal Share program.
EMPOWER:	BROOKS facilitated a select few instances that reached the empower level of the spectrum, where the community was entrusted with making specific decisions that directly impacted the community. This was achieved by helping organisations build capacity to develop their own programs and initiatives.

2.0 Methodology

Project governance model



Fortnightly Update Meetings

- held with the Project Control Group (2 General Managers of PAYCE, Project Directors of MProjects, Community Engagement Team, PAYCE Communications Representative)
- provided regular updates regarding any community concerns or queries the engagement team has received, engagement activities and sponsorships.



Monthly Reports

 produced for PAYCE detailing community engagement activities conducted by BROOKS.



Community Engagement Log

- used to record all correspondence between the engagement team and the Melrose Park community
- ensuring accountability and transparency within the engagement project
- provided an objective record of all engagement activities for future evaluation purposes.



Annual Reports

 produced for PAYCE detailing the scope and impact of PAYCE's investment in community engagement throughout Melrose Park.

Engagement methods

1. Building stakeholder networks

Since 2016, PAYCE has established relationships with several community groups in the Melrose Park area. These relationships have helped PAYCE to develop an understanding of the Melrose Park community, while also giving local residents a voice in the project.

Community groups engaged

EDUCATION	SPORTING & RECREATION GROUPS	OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS	COMMUNITY ACTION GROUPS
Melrose Park Public School Melrose Park OSHC St Michael's Meadowbank Ermington Public School Marsden High School	West Ryde Rovers Ermington United Ryde Rugby Tigers Baseball and Softball ERNA Ryde Eastwood Touch Football Ryde Eastwood Oz Tag Melrose Park FC	Riverside Community Church Michael Hughes Foundation Ryde Parramatta Golf Club Live Life Get Active Melrose Park Community Group Parramatta Youth Choir Riverside Theatre Parramatta Women's Shelter	Melrose Park Active Participation Group (MPRAG) Waterfront Action Group (WAG) Traffic Safety Advisory Group

- Melrose Park Community Group (MPCG) We initially established the Melrose Park Community Group as an advisory committee involving key stakeholders brainstorming community events and initiatives. Working alongside PAYCE, our facilitators brought together six local not-for-profits and community organisations active in the Melrose Park community to establish a volunteer working group. Through effective collaboration, BROOKS supported the six local organisations to collectively run events and programs that raise funds and awareness for the local organisations servicing the Melrose Park community.
- Melrose Park Traffic Safety Advisory Group (TSAG) In response to growing community concerns regarding traffic and parking, BROOKS established an advisory committee with local school representatives, community members and the developer, PAYCE, to provide a platform for community members and school representatives to discuss their ideas, concerns and solutions for the urban renewal. This proactive approach allowed stakeholders to speak directly with the developer and be listened to. The group meets quarterly and has achieved many successes for the wider community. For example, due to the advocacy of TSAG, two zebra crossings were approved to be installed along Hope and Mary Street near Melrose Park Public School.
- Melrose Park Residents Action Group (MPRAG) MPRAG is a group of local residents in the Melrose Park community who meet monthly to discuss issues and changes in the Melrose Park community. BROOKS has formed a relationship with MPRAG and has facilitated regular opportunities for the group to communicate directly with PAYCE regarding the urban renewal.
- 2. Focusing on local schools and education By identifying the central role that schools, staff and their community play in developing a strong, inclusive community, we developed a



strategy to inform and engage with staff, students and parents about the urban renewal project. We sought opportunities for PAYCE to partner with local schools and build mutually beneficial relationships by regularly meeting local school principals. Over \$500,000 has been provided by PAYCE to schools in the local area, and over 30+ school events and initiatives have been supported. Moreover, we have facilitated opportunities for local parents and school principals to provide feedback and raise concerns about the development by inviting PAYCE representatives to attend several P&C meetings, provide project updates and answer any questions or concerns the P&C may have.



- 3. Local community events BROOKS organised and facilitated over 50 community events for PAYCE to support within the community, including community BBQs, movie nights, golf days, school fundraisers, fetes and local sporting events. These community events helped to establish positive wellbeing and vibrancy in the community, as well as providing opportunities for connection between both existing and new residents of the development.
- Melrose Park Community Cup The first initiative that BROOKS invited the six local community organisations to work together on was a shared fundraising and community-building event. The inaugural 2017 Melrose Park Community Cup successfully engaged hard-to-reach community members for the Melrose Park project by tapping



into each of the six organisations' networks and inviting their stakeholders to participate in a community golf day and gala dinner. This initiative has become an annual event in the Melrose Park calendar and has raised over \$500,000 for the local community. The event's success has resulted in forming the Melrose Park Community Group to continue activities all year round.

 Following the Melrose Park Community Cup, the Melrose Park Community Group has collaborated on several community development events, programs and activities for the Melrose Park community, such as trivia nights, Christmas Carols, Christmas Light competition, outdoor cinemas and regular community BBQs.

4. Community sponsorships, initiatives and programs



We established mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships between PAYCE and the Melrose Park community, encouraging PAYCE to contribute over \$1 million to the community to help bolster the capacity and capability of local community groups in the area. Through identifying opportunities for community sponsorships, initiatives and programs from key local stakeholders, BROOKS has helped PAYCE build connections with key local community leaders and demonstrate their commitment to supporting the Melrose Park community. This has enhanced PAYCE's positive reputation in the community as a socially responsible developer.

Melrose Park Meal Share – During the COVID-19 pandemic, BROOKS facilitators responded to several concerns brought forward by Melrose Park Community Group members regarding vulnerable members of the local community who were doing it tough. BROOKS set up and managed a confidential referral system where locals could refer vulnerable community members who may otherwise have slipped through the cracks.



- The Meal Share program employed Kick Start trainees to cook, package and deliver free meals twice a week to recipients who had opted into the service.
- 5. Communication We established a dedicated phone line and email address to ensure that any community queries or concerns were addressed efficiently and on time. We also used social media, websites and letterbox leaflets to establish a reference point for the community to access further information about the urban renewal project.
- Village Talk is a quarterly publication we developed alongside the Melrose
 Park community to provide information and news about community events
 and opportunities for stakeholder input. We used this publication to
 connect with the local community by inviting local residents to contribute
 articles and quotes about local events and history within Melrose Park.



6. Responding effectively to community concerns – We have implemented processes to ensure individuals feel heard and understood when concerns are raised. Each complaint is logged and addressed within 24 hours through a specialised response line, which automatically alerts the engagement and project management teams. Since construction began in 2018, only 56 complaints have been logged, relating mainly to construction impacts (e.g. traffic, dust and noise). These concerns have all been addressed or resolved promptly, creating positive relationships and connections between the local community and BROOKS.

Alignment with IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation

IAP2 Core Values	Example of how this was considered in
	the design of your project methodology
Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process	Over the last four years, BROOKS has continued to develop a positive relationship with the Melrose Park Residents Action Group (MPRAG). MPRAG has provided a valuable resource for BROOKS to understand and address any concerns or issues held by residents in the Melrose Park community.
Public participation includes the promise that the	BROOKS established the Traffic Advisory
public's contribution will influence the decision	Safety Committee (TASC) to enable community members to meet regularly with BROOKS and PAYCE to address concerns held by the community regarding traffic issues caused by the development. Since 2019, the group has met quarterly and has provided BROOKS with consistent opportunities to facilitate direct communication between residents and PAYCE about traffic issues. Outcomes achieved by the establishment of the TASC include: • A pedestrian crossing was installed and upgraded on Waratah St to ensure safety for students crossing roads near schools • A new digital sign was installed to alert drivers of speed limits near schools • Speed bumps installed on Hope and Waratah St for student safety • A 'no-stopping zone' was introduced in Colbram Lane.
Public participation promotes sustainable decisions	We created a specialised phone response
by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers	line to efficiently respond to all community concerns within 24 hours. BROOKS actively listened to ensure that each individual who

		expressed a concern felt heard. Following a complaint, we conducted continuous follow-ups to provide further information and/or resolve a complaint. As a result, BROOKS has successfully established a degree of trust between the community and PAYCE.
4.	Public participation seeks out and facilitates the	BROOKS established the Melrose Park
	involvement of those potentially affected by or	Community Group (MPCG) to involve a
	interested in a decision	broader scope of the community in the
		decisions to be made. Consisting of key
		leaders from six local community groups, the
		MPCG meets regularly with BROOKS and
		PAYCE to provide feedback and insights
		regarding the impact of the development,
		plan community events, assist BROOKS with
		community initiatives and help to disseminate
		useful information from PAYCE to the wider
		community.
5.	Public participation seeks input from participants in	Through the Mealshare , participants helped
	designing how they participate	design how BROOKS would go out to the
		community and deliver meals to vulnerable
		members of the community. BROOKS
		established a referral system where key
		community leaders acted as referrers for
		those who would benefit from the service.
		Each client was personally contacted by the
		BROOKS engagement team to sign up for
		the service, followed by regular check-ins for
		feedback.
6.	Public participation provides participants with the	We used the Village Talk newsletter to
	information they need to participate in a meaningful	provide regular updates about the urban
	way	renewal project and opportunities for the local
		community to share local stories and
		knowledge. Our engagement often engaged
		residents to contribute quotes, interviews and

	stories about local events, history and residents.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how	BROOKS engaged with schools and asked
their input affected the decision	how they wanted to celebrate education
	week during the COVID-19 lockdowns. As a
	result of their one-on-one meetings with
	school principals, BROOKS collaborated
	with all schools during the COVID-19
	lockdowns to display student artwork along
	school fences. This community initiative
	helped provide a sense of community and
	belonging during a time of isolation and
	disconnection. Following the success of the
	2020 Education Week Artwork initiative, the
	initiative was reintroduced in 2022.

Verbatim quote/s from organisation representatives

'Engagement with BROOKS and PAYCE has been positive and has enabled increased support of school/community initiatives to build and strengthen community connections. Opportunities to share good news stories and promote Ermington PS through Village Talk has been beneficial. Having built relationships early and having the vision shared with me from the onset of the development, I have felt confident with the direction of the Melrose Park project. Information updates are easy to access and concern from my school community has been minimal.'— Jen Riley, Principal of Ermington Public School

'BROOKS provided a link between the community and developers. By engaging with BROOKS, I felt that I was able to have my concerns about the development heard and addressed.' – Clare Kristensen, Principal of Melrose Park Public School

'BROOKS are leaders in how to connect and engage with an organisation. Despite his busy schedule, Lance is very hands on, present and available anytime you need him. Our relationship is based on genuine friendship and trust, and our interactions are always filled with empathy and support.' – Julie Hughes, Founding Director of Michael Hughes Foundation

'What I like about the Melrose Park project is that it has taken into account the needs of the local community and how the project will impact us. They have been transparent with the process and have given the local community ample opportunity to understand what is happening.' – Nina Mathers, MPPS P&C and Melrose Park Community Group Committee member

3.0 Manage engagement

One of the most significant challenges during the engagement was overcoming fear of change.

Transitioning from a primarily industrial area to a high-density residential area sparks fear within residents that their quiet way of life will be disrupted. They fear that the influx of new residents will change the character of their suburb and will overwhelm local infrastructure and amenities, such as schools and roads. Further, many residents had concerns about the impact of construction in the area, such as concerns about levels of dust and noise.

To mitigate these concerns, BROOKS undertook a proactive approach to engaging with local stakeholders from the outset. By meeting with residents before any development applications (DAs) were lodged and before construction began, BROOKS built rapport with residents and addressed any concerns about the development before any works began. This proactive approach resulted in a smooth process for PAYCE, with no delays in the DA approval process, no delays during construction, and a low level of community complaints. Moreover, through regular meetings with key stakeholders and local community groups, BROOKS has maintained a consistent approach to addressing and resolving issues as they arise.

Additionally, we established a specialised response line to ensure we could respond quickly and effectively to community concerns. To ensure that all community concerns were addressed within 24 hours, automatic notifications were sent by the response line to both the BROOKS team and PAYCE's project management team.

Another challenge that arose concerned enabling social cohesion between the old and new residents of Melrose Park. Village Talk, the quarterly newsletter produced and distributed by BROOKS, was a highly successful tool to inform and engage residents. In addition to providing the Melrose Park community with project updates and information about community events and initiatives, it also worked as a highly effective engagement tool that provided BROOKS with opportunities to meet with residents and collaborate with them to produce stories. The BROOKS engagement team often contacted residents to give quotes, conduct interviews and contribute articles to be shared in *Village Talk*.

Moreover, local community events were organised and facilitated by BROOKS to provide the local community with opportunities to meet and connect in a social environment. As such, events such as the annual Christmas Carols and Outdoor Cinema were used to bring the whole community together in a fun, family-friendly environment.

Finally, to overcome the challenges of reaching people during COVID-19, BROOKS relied on its close relationship with the Melrose Park Community Group to gain access to its extensive stakeholder networks. This group has been a vital asset to the BROOKS Community Development project, as BROOKS has leveraged its strong relationships with key community leaders to disseminate information and reach the wider Melrose Park community. For example, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, BROOKS established a referral system where key community leaders in the Melrose Park Community Group acted as referrers for those in

the community who would greatly benefit from the service. As a result, over 30,000 meals were delivered to assist vulnerable community members during a significantly challenging time.

4.0 Outcomes, impact and insights

Lessons learned

So often, community engagement surrounding an urban renewal project focuses on a development's physical structures rather than social infrastructure. By investing time in people and prioritising actively listening to the community, significant dividends to a client's bottom line are received, such as adhering to project timelines and budgets and reducing time spent acquiring development approvals.

It is important to remember the importance of building social capital and to invest time and money into partnering with the community and building strong stakeholder networks. By making positive working relationships and genuinely listening to the community, unexpected opportunities and insights arise that significantly impact project timelines through meeting budgets and a smoother DA approval process.

Reflection and evaluation of engagement

Active community engagement in the Melrose Park area has helped create a vibrant and well-connected community where all residents can find a sense of belonging and connection to the area. It has connected community members to PAYCE, ensuring residents feel well informed and involved in the Melrose Park project. Local community groups have been empowered to build strong relationships and partner with each other to deliver highly successful local events for the community, a long-lasting legacy of the Melrose Park Community Development project.

Over seven years, we have weaved together a rich and diverse tapestry of stakeholder relationships within the Melrose Park community. These stakeholder relationships have built the foundation of the Melrose Park Community Development by facilitating a two-way dialogue between the developers and the Melrose Park community. Investing substantial amounts of time into building strong working relationships with stakeholders has allowed us to successfully increase PAYCE's social capital within the Melrose Park community, earning the trust and cooperation of the community. This has provided significant dividends to PAYCE's bottom line, resulting in a streamlined development process with fewer delays.

Creating and maintaining positive relationships with key stakeholder groups and community leaders has created opportunities for future communication and regular meetings to receive feedback and develop solutions. Further, through active listening and working collaboratively with the community, we have developed a sponsorship budget for PAYCE to respond to the community's needs, investing over \$1 million into the Melrose Park community.

Reach



Outcomes

- 1. Fostering a sense of trust and collaboration with key stakeholders Through developing a strong working relationship with the community, BROOKS fostered a sense of trust and cooperation, resulting in a streamlined development process. By engaging in frequent and transparent communication with the community, BROOKS was able to address concerns and mitigate potential issues, resulting in no delays in the DA approval process
 - Furthermore, this close relationship with the community allowed BROOKS to anticipate
 potential complaints and proactively address them during the planning and DA process,
 leading to fewer complaints overall
 - This level of community engagement also meant no time delays during construction, as BROOKS had already taken steps to ensure the community was prepared for disruptions
 - Finally, the low number of issues on social media suggests that the community was largely satisfied with the development process, a testament to the effectiveness of BROOKS' engagement strategy.

- Established opportunities for regular involvement and input from the community BROOKS
 facilitators ensured regular on-site presence at Melrose Park to be available for the community to
 provide their feedback or concerns. They established an open-door policy encouraging community
 members to share their thoughts and opinions
 - BROOKS also made a point of following up with community members to continue engagement into the future, ensuring that concerns were addressed and solutions were provided where possible.
- Enhancing PAYCE's goodwill and social capital in the Melrose Park community By working
 collaboratively with the community and proactively seeking opportunities to align the community's
 needs with PAYCE's goals, BROOKS has enhanced PAYCE's goodwill and social capital in the
 Melrose Park community.

Engagement takeaways

- 1. **Proactive approach** Being approachable and present with the community shows genuine commitment. High levels of trust and positive relationships are built by being readily available to the community to listen to any community concerns or queries.
- 2. **The power of connection** The community can achieve a great deal when it works together. By collaborating with community groups and residents, the community was invited to join the process of developing a rich and vibrant community alongside the developer.
- 3. Actively seeking opportunities for further engagement Rather than viewing community concerns as a threat to success, the BROOKS engagement team utilised these opportunities to further engage with the community, building trust and positive relationships through listening and working to understand their needs.

Acknowledgements and to find out more:





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At the time of publishing, Lance Brooks was the Managing Director at BROOKS Community Engagement, Jack Brooks was employed as Senior Project Facilitator and Community Development, Adriana Pielak was employed as a Community Engagement Consultant and Angela Dela Cruz was employed as Communications and Research Officer.

For more information about this project see:

- https://www.melroseparkcommunitygroup.com/village-talk-1
- https://www.facebook.com/MelroseParkCommunityGroup

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