
11 May 2015

DUNEDIN NORTH ISSUES

Joint statement from:

- Dunedin City Council - Mayor Dave Cull
- University of Otago – Vice Chancellor
- Otago University Students Association - President
- Otago Polytechnic - CEO
- Otago Polytechnic Students Association - President
- Police - Otago Coastal Area Commander, District Commander Southern, Campus Constable
- Hospitality NZ, Otago Branch - President
- Otago Motel Association - President
- Southern District Health Board – Chief Executive, Chief Medical Officer
- Otago Property Investors Association - President

Dunedin North, home to the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic, is New Zealand’s only residential campus. It is an older suburb with significant history and contrasting building quality. Contemporary high quality student accommodation sits among adapted Victorian and Edwardian villas, some of unhealthy standard. The suburb also hosts Otago Museum, Forsyth Barr Stadium, Dunedin Hospital, Hocken Library, University of Otago (cricket) Oval and Logan Park sports complex, as well as nearly half of the city’s motel accommodation. The city is proud of the vibrancy, energy and achievement generated in the area.

For several reasons, the area is a socialising mecca for younger people. Those include:

- Greatly increased numbers of students from outside the region attending the University and Polytechnic;
- Much denser residential development to accommodate those students;
- An historically permissive community attitude to street parties in the area;
- Social media enabling large gatherings to occur with little notice;
- The high density of off-licences in the area selling alcohol considerably below on-license prices has contributed to the closure of most traditional pubs. This, in turn, encourages drinking in the street or at private addresses.
Those reasons, combined with New Zealanders’ problematic attitude to alcohol, have led to a number of disturbing trends and outcomes:

- Large noisy parties that spill onto the street disturbing neighbours and businesses, especially accommodation businesses;
- Large amounts of broken glass and other rubbish in the streets;
- Some gross intoxication and disorderly behaviour;
- Fires lit both in private properties and in streets;
- Vandalism of private and public property;
- Dangerous activities like climbing onto roofs;
- A high proportion of the admissions to the hospital Accident and Emergency Department for alcohol related injuries and/or conditions being young people, many of whom are non-students.

While much of this has been evident for some years, acceptance by affected parties in the Dunedin North area appears to be declining. There is concern by students, academic staff and the wider community about:

- Deliberately lit fires;
- Glass and rubbish strewn streets which is hazardous, unsightly and gives a very negative impression to visitors;
- Binge drinking and the negative effects on students’ academic progress and health;
- Publicity about the excesses of street parties having a negative reputational effect on both our tertiary educational institutions and Dunedin itself;
- Guests at motels in the area being frequently disturbed and offended by the behaviour of drunken young people in the streets late at night;
- Non students, some of high school age, from other parts of Dunedin, being attracted to the area.

While it must be emphasised that the worst behaviour comes from a minority, the situation presents very real safety risks for young people, and the behaviour risks of binge drinking, vandalism and public disorder.

Overly permissive acceptance, indeed normalisation of excessive behaviour, and little positive expectation of Dunedin North’s young people by the community, has entrenched, even encouraged dangerous behaviour by a few.

There is clearly a pressing need to address these issues, to keep young people in the city safer, to curb the excesses of alcohol fuelled behaviour, and to protect the livelihoods of Dunedin’s businesses and tertiary educational institutions. These issues will not be successfully addressed simply by an imposed set of sanctions. Positive measures such as environmental improvement and support for socialising alternatives must be considered.

The consensus reached by the various stakeholders, sector groups and affected parties, is an opportunity to collaborate positively to change the attitudes prevalent in Dunedin North and to re-establish pride in our community, our vibrant campus precinct and in our educational institutions. We each have a role to play and collective leadership will be essential over time.
The signatories of this statement will work together collaboratively, contributing different tools and measures as they are able, to address the issues outlined above, with the aim of keeping the city’s young people safe, restoring an attitude of pride and mutual respect in our community, and recreating Dunedin North as a showcase of 21st century urban lifestyle.

Mayor of Dunedin Dave Cull

University of Otago Vice Chancellor

OUSA President

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