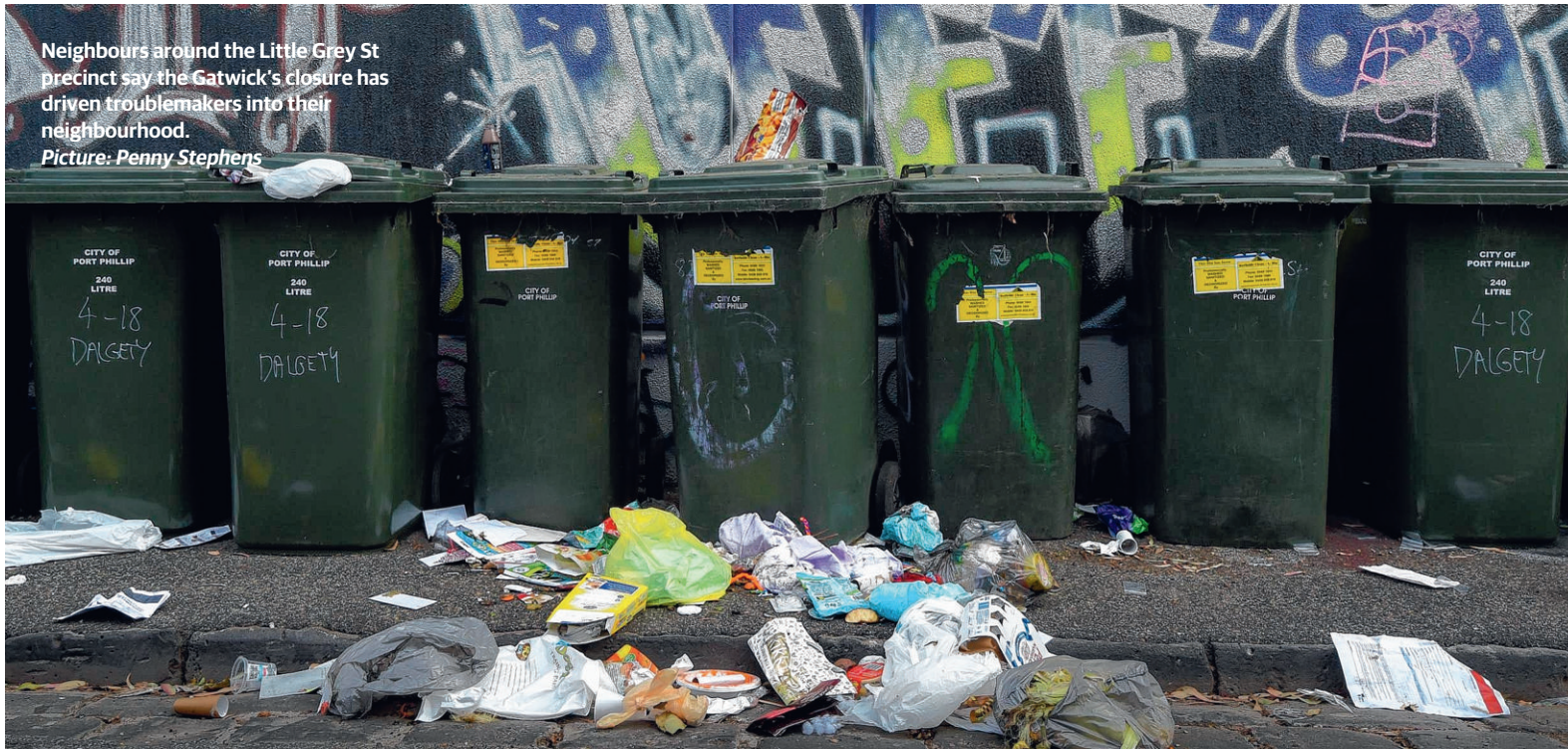


Neighbours around the Little Grey St precinct say the Gatwick's closure has driven troublemakers into their neighbourhood.
Picture: Penny Stephens



‘New Gatwick’ on the block

Neighbours of St Kilda rooming house living in fear as anti-social problems move up the street

Jordy Atkinson

Drug use, assaults and prostitution have spiralled out of control near a St Kilda boarding house neighbours have dubbed the “new Gatwick”.

A huge dossier of crimes and bad behaviour compiled by residents over the past two months, seen by the *Leader*, shows neighbours of The Regal are living in fear.

Police have confirmed a surge in calls from distressed residents. The situation has prompted calls for tougher security, including 24-hour guards at the 49-room boarding house on Little Grey St.

Friends of St Kilda Hill convener Darren Robinson told the *Leader* the community faced daily

exposure to drug use, violence and verbal abuse.

“This is not the St Kilda I know; it might have been the St Kilda near the Gatwick but not at this end,” he said.

“Kids used to play cricket in the laneway most afternoons but they haven’t now for three months.”

Mr Robinson said incidents included rocks being thrown at cars, fences set alight, and daylight drug deals out of car windows.

One Dalgety St resident had his phone stolen in a break-in at his home. He tracked it to The Regal using the ‘Find My Phone’ app.

Port Phillip Inspector Jason Kelly said “securing the front door” of The Regal, managed by Port Phillip Housing Association, was

key to stemming the tide of crime.

He said police had increased patrols and helped the association evict residents who had breached house rules.

Association chief executive Haleh Homaei said 18 people had been evicted for “bad behaviour” in the past couple of months.

“There is no quick fix, and I don’t believe in band aid solutions,” she said. “I am not sitting here ignoring concerns but ... 24/7 security is only a temporary measure, it’s not going to be sustainable.”

Ms Homaei said meetings with other support agencies, police and the council began in December.

Since then, she said, visiting hours had been reduced at The Regal, CCTV in common areas had

been upgraded and security patrols were sent out twice each night.

Ms Homaei said the rooms left vacant after residents were evicted had not been filled and were boarded up to keep squatters out.

Ms Homaei said medium to long term measures included building an office at the site, which will be staffed during business hours, and turning the rooms into self-contained units with private kitchens and bathrooms.

Ms Homaei said once the rooms were converted the building would house people over 55 years old.

“I understand it’s not pleasant for neighbours and families but the issues extend far beyond one property and cannot be solved by one person or organisation alone.

Urban forest idea gains momentum



Arron Wood in Elsternwick Park.

The push to turn part of Brighton’s Elsternwick Park into an “urban forest” and wetland is gathering pace.

About 150 people attended a recent meeting by the Elsternwick Park Coalition and backed the plan.

The northern part of the park is a golf course, and the operators have until the end of March to notify Bayside Council if they wish to continue the lease.

Elsternwick Park Coalition member Arron Wood said a wetland, not a sports oval, would be the best outcome for the area.

“There is a...majority of residents, who are not young families with young children, who don’t want another oval,” Mr Wood said. “We want passive recreation where you can walk around and enjoy the area.

“There are 44 ovals in Bayside and no wetland/urban forest.”

Mr Wood said a survey of 1250 households around the park indicated strong support.

Bayside Council’s Mick Cummins said Leisure Management Services, the course leaseholder, had two five-year lease options at its discretion, spanning 2018-28. Leisure Management Services did not respond to *Leader’s* request for comment.

open day

saturday 3 march, 11am - 2pm

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Caulfield Campus, 217 Glen Eira Rd. East St Kilda

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