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Little India Traders Fear Eviction in Dandenong Revamp

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Traders in Dandenong’s Little India Cultural Precinct face uncertainty as a \$600 million redevelopment threatens their businesses with rising rents and relocation challenges.

Traders in Dandenong’s Little India Cultural Precinct, a vibrant hub of Indian and subcontinental commerce for over three decades, are bracing for significant disruption as a \$600 million redevelopment project looms. The initiative, led by private developer Capital Alliance in partnership with Development Victoria, aims to transform a 2-hectare site near Dandenong Railway Station with apartments, offices, and a new retail laneway, per The

Urban Developer. However, local business owners fear the project could force them out due to unaffordable rent increases and temporary relocations, threatening the precinct's unique character.

Sudesh Singh, a clothing store owner and spokesperson for the Little India Traders Association (LITA), told The Guardian that the precinct, home to 33 Indian businesses including eateries and fashion retailers, is struggling with slow trade and empty storefronts. Singh expressed concern that Capital Alliance's proposed rent hikes, potentially doubling for some, could be a "planned deterrent" to push traders out, as stated in an open letter to Premier Jacinta Allan, reported by Dandenong Star Journal. The redevelopment, part of the Revitalising Central Dandenong (RCD) project since 2006, will relocate Little India shops to a laneway between Halpin Way and Foster Street, with construction starting in 2026.

Victorian Minister for Development Victoria, Colin Brooks, claimed the project would create "modern facilities" and "more opportunities" for traders, per Beat Magazine. Yet, Dandenong Community Association's Silvia Mastrogiovanni criticized the lack of genuine community consultation, telling Dandenong Star Journal that sessions in March and October 2024 were poorly publicized and failed to address concerns about traffic and parking. Traders like Steve Khan, who owns multiple businesses, warned ABC News that the staged relocation could "break Little India," with five shops facing demolition without clear compensation plans.

The precinct, recognized as Melbourne's first Indian Cultural Precinct in 2015 with a \$500,000 state grant, supports a community of 12,000 Indian-born residents, per the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. As construction looms, traders and residents demand clearer commitments to preserve Little India's heritage, fearing the loss of a cultural cornerstone amid rising economic pressures and inadequate government support.