

**ITEM 2. BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT GRANTS – NATIONAL ART SCHOOL****FILE NO: S122193****SUMMARY**

Council unanimously adopted the *City of Sydney Live Music and Performance Action Plan* on 7 April 2014. The Action Plan proposes a range of actions to increase live music and performance programming in City of Sydney venues.

Section 1 of the Action Plan, 'Development Controls and Noise', specifically discusses strategies to address the ongoing challenge of maintaining an active, sustainable night time and visitor economy that includes live music and performance, while also ensuring reasonable levels of noise and amenity for inner-city residents.

In an effort to encourage a collaborative approach to addressing this challenge, as part of the most recent Grants and Sponsorship Policy review, the City introduced a new element to the Business Improvement Grant Program that provides targeted support to improve precinct amenity and stimulate business activity through matched funding of acoustic audits within local venues. This grant focuses on operators or property owners who wish to increase the level of live music and performance activity taking place within their premises and require professional advice from acoustic consultants to provide targeted advice on the acoustic opportunities and limitations of the site.

The National Art School (the School) is an independent visual arts educational institution located in Darlinghurst, a short distance from Oxford Street. The School has been operating since the 1840s and is the longest continuing publicly funded art school in Australia. Since 1922, it has been located within the historic former Darlinghurst Gaol site.

The School's recently adopted strategic plan, *Towards 2022*, identifies four pillars that will guide the organisation over the coming years. Pillars two and three of the plan are to:

2. *Unlock the historical and cultural significance of the National Art School site for the benefit of the broader community.*
3. *Create a vibrant cultural hub that attracts and inspires Australia's diverse communities.*

The School is in the initial stages of developing a plan of management for the site that will allow the organisation to achieve these aims. This will include preparation and submission of a development application. As part of the preparation of the application, the School wishes to engage an acoustic consultant to provide advice on how the site could be most effectively used for live music and performance activity, as well as other cultural activity, and have approached the City for assistance with the cost. The School has applied for two grants under the Business Improvement Grant Program, to a total of \$6,050 matched funding.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve \$1,750 (excluding GST) as a Business Improvement Grant (Acoustic Audit) to the National Art School for the procurement of acoustic advice relating to outdoor events;
- (B) Council approve \$4,300 (excluding GST) as a Business Improvement Grant (Acoustic Audit) to the National Art School for the procurement of acoustic advice relating to the Cell Block Theatre; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a funding agreement with the National Art School.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Nil.

**BACKGROUND**

1. Council unanimously adopted the *City of Sydney Live Music and Performance Action Plan* on 7 April 2014. One of the key points of focus within the Action Plan is the challenge associated with managing entertainment noise in densely populated mixed use urban areas. The Action Plan discusses a range of strategies to address these challenges, including internal process and policy reform, advocacy to the NSW Government for legislative reform, provision of information resources and advice, and provision of funding to live music and performance producers and venues.
2. As part of the most recent review of the City's Grants and Sponsorship Policy, the Business Improvement Grant Program was expanded to include the provision of funding to local businesses and organisations wishing to introduce, increase or refine a program of live music and performance. The purpose of this funding was to increase the level of live music and performance programming in the City of Sydney, as well as encourage existing operators with programming to optimise the acoustic performance of their venue.
3. The School's strategic plan – *Toward 2022* – highlights the need for the organisation to engage with broader, more diverse communities into the future. While the core focus of the organisation remains visual arts education, it has identified a range of opportunities to better integrate with the Sydney community. These opportunities are identified and prioritised through their alignment with four pillars that form the structure of the strategic plan.
4. The most relevant pillars to this report are to “unlock the historical and cultural significance of the National Art School site for the benefit of the broader community” and “create a vibrant cultural hub that attracts and inspires Australia's diverse communities”.
5. The specific activities that will be undertaken to achieve these goals include the creation of a cultural precinct with diverse income streams, development of strategic partnerships with local, national and international cultural organisations and raising awareness of the School site and its cultural and historical significance.
6. In undertaking these activities, the School hopes to increase visitation and access, foster community pride in the site, activate an under-utilised inner city location and provide a greater variety of visitor attractors (such as live music and performance, markets and food-focused events).
7. All of these activities, and the broad objectives that guide them, are well aligned with the City's policy priorities and strategic interests. City strategies that are particularly relevant to the School's aims include the *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024*, *Live Music and Performance Action Plan*, *Economic Development Strategy* and *OPEN Sydney Strategy and Action Plan 2013-2030*.
8. The City has received two Business Improvement Grant (Acoustic Audit) applications from the National Art School to support the hiring of acoustic consultants. The total request is \$6,050 excluding GST, consisting of one application of \$1,750 for the cost of acoustic advice relating to outdoor events, and one of \$4,300 for advice relating to use of the Cell Block Theatre.

9. The Cell Block Theatre is one of the most historically significant theatre spaces in Sydney. Opened in 1958, the theatre was a hub of cultural activity including music, dance and theatre. Many of the emerging artists who have performed within the Cell Block have become an integral part of Australia's cultural landscape. These include John Bell, Jim Sharman, Lynette Curran, Nigel Butterley, Marilyn Richardson, Carl Vine, Grahame Bond, Nick Cave, Garth Welch, Patrick White and David Malouf. In recent years, the Cell Block has operated as a venue for hire, hosting occasional events. In order to increase the number of public events taking place in the theatre, the School wishes to better understand its acoustic characteristics and limitations.
10. The School would like to introduce a range of outdoor cultural events to the campus, such as outdoor long table dinners and quarterly Sunday afternoon / early evening music events. Previous outdoor events that have taken place within the campus have highlighted the need for greater attention to sound management and the School is seeking to understand the best approach to managing the sound generated by these events by seeking advice from acoustic specialists before developing its program further.
11. The advice received will be used to inform the preparation of a development application to enable the School to undertake significantly more culturally focused events. As part of the contractual agreement associated with this grant, the City will require the School to attend a pre-DA meeting with City planning staff prior to its lodgement.

## KEY IMPLICATIONS

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

12. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
  - (a) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – through this grant, the City will be helping to facilitate broader community access to the School site and the provision of opportunities for the community to engage in cultural activity. This is a direct contribution to objective 6.1 of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Community Strategic Plan, which identifies the need for the City to be a 'network of distinctive villages which provide places for communities to live, meet, shop, create, play, discover, learn and work'.
  - (b) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City – Objective 7.1 of the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Community Strategic Plan identifies the need for creativity to be a 'consistent and visible feature of the public domain' and for there to be support for 'the development of distinctive cultural precincts in the city and its villages'. While the School site has the potential to become a cultural precinct of its own, it is also located very close to Oxford Street, one of the most prominent precincts in the City of Sydney Local Government Area (LGA). The City has focused on supporting the cultural and creative activity that takes place within Oxford Street for a number of years. This grant will contribute to these efforts.

**Economic**

13. *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024* and the *Economic Development Strategy* both identify the importance of the creative industries in driving positive economic outcomes for the City of Sydney. Provision of greater opportunities for cultural activity within the Oxford Street precinct will strengthen the precinct's position as a cultural hub and increase visitation, which will have positive flow-on benefits for surrounding businesses. As such, the City is supportive of the School's efforts to maximise its potential as a cultural precinct.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

14. Funding of \$6,050 cash (excluding GST) is available in the 2015/16 Business Improvement Grant (Acoustic Audit) Grants and Sponsorships budget.

**RELEVANT LEGISLATION**

15. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993.

**CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES**

16. The School requests early advice so that plans and budgets can be finalised and opportunities to recognise the City's contribution can be optimised.

**PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

17. Public endorsement of the *Live Music and Performance Action Plan* and *Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024* indicates general support for increasing the live music and performance programming in the City LGA.

**KIM WOODBURY**

Chief Operating Officer

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