

Continuing the Transformation of Central Sydney - Project Scope - Town Hall Square

File No: X118741

Summary

This report outlines the proposed scope of works for Town Hall Square, a new civic square in the centre of Sydney.

The proposed Town Hall Square, located within the block bounded by George, Pitt, Park and Bathurst Streets, forms part of the continued transformation of Central Sydney and has been a long-term vision for the City.

In February 2025, Council resolved that the Chief Executive Officer investigate financially responsible options to accelerate the delivery of the 'Town Hall Square' project for consideration as part of the 2025/26 budget including project scope and costings, such that works commence by 2028.

In May 2025, Council resolved to accelerate the delivery of Town Hall Square, such that demolition works are targeted to commence by early 2028 and a capital works budget of \$150M was included in the FY26 Long Term Financial Plan for the delivery of the project.

In July 2025, the City commenced the development of the project scope with advice from a sub-committee of Design Advisory Panel (DAP) and Public Art Advisory Panel (PAAP) members. From July to December 2025 the subcommittee met on 5 occasions to review and advise on the development of the project scope. The outcomes of the sub-committee were also shared with the full Design Advisory Panel twice. The recommended project scope outlined in this report considers the site constraints and opportunities and is informed by the principles of the Town Hall Public Domain Plan and The Public Space Public Life Study 2020 by Gehl Architects.

In September 2025, the City commenced the engagement of consultants to provide services for the delivery of Town Hall Square, including a Head Design Consultant and sub-consultant team - as outlined in a separate report. The Head Design Consultant will develop the project scope into a concept design and documentation for construction.

This report recommends that Council endorse the proposed scope of works for the Town Hall Square project.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council endorse the scope of works for the Town Hall Square project as described in the subject report and as generally indicated at Attachment B to the subject report for the purposes of progression to required concept design, planning approvals, documentation and construction of works.

Attachments

Attachment A. Location Plan and Extent of Works

Attachment B. Project Scope

Background

1. The proposed Town Hall Square, located within the block bounded by George, Pitt, Park and Bathurst Streets, forms part of the continued transformation of Central Sydney and has been a long-term vision for the City.
2. In 1982, Council supported the proposal of former Lord Mayor Doug Sutherland to acquire properties on George and Park Streets to deliver an eastern extension of Sydney Square opposite Sydney Town Hall. In 1989, that plan evolved under Lord Mayor Jeremy Bingham by extending the acquisition area to deliver a Town Hall Square. The first property, 532-540 George Street, was acquired in 1985 and Council has continued to purchase more buildings as opportunities have arisen.
3. In 2007, Gehl Architects conducted a Public Space and Life Study of central Sydney. This study looked quantitatively and qualitatively at public spaces in the heart of our city. The study recommended creating 3 city squares connected by a revitalised George Street. In 2008 Sustainable Sydney 2030 clearly articulated a vision for 'Three Linked City Squares', based on the recommendations of the study.
4. In 2012, Council endorsed the Sydney Local Environmental Plan which defined the area for the future Town Hall Square project as the properties 532-540 George Street, 542-544 George Street, part 546-552 George Street, 5-7 Park Street, 295-301 Pitt Street, 303-305 Pitt Street and 307 Pitt Street.
5. In 2020 The Public Space Public Life Study 2020 by Gehl Architects reaffirmed the need for the Three Squares following the completion of the light rail, the ongoing pedestrianisation of George Street and post Covid-19, to encourage the community back to the city centre.
6. In 2021, Council adopted the Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan. The plan provides a coordinated response for improvements for streets and public spaces in the precinct including Town Hall Square and is based on the informing principles and directions set out in Sustainable Sydney 2030 and Public Space Public Life 2007 and 2020.
7. In 2022, Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision expanded on the Three Linked City Squares concept and included the Town Hall Square project as one of the 10 project ideas.
8. In February 2025, via a Lord Mayoral Minute, Council requested the Chief Executive Officer investigate financially responsible options to accelerate the delivery of the 'Town Hall Square' project for consideration as part of the 2025/26 budget including project scope and costings, such that demolition works commence by 2028.
9. In May 2025 Council:
 - (a) noted that the delivery of Town Hall Square is proposed to be accelerated, such that demolition works are targeted to commence by early 2028;
 - (b) endorsed the development of a concept design for Town Hall Square as described in the subject report for the purposes of engaging design consultants, noting a concept plan will be submitted to Council for concept design approval once developed; and

- (c) endorsed commencing the compulsory acquisition process with respect to the required interests in 542-544 George Street, Sydney for the purposes of the proposed Town Hall Square in accordance with the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 (NSW) (Just Terms Act) by issuing opening letters and seeking to negotiate with the relevant interest holders.
10. In July 2025, the City commenced the development of the project scope with advice from a sub-committee of Design Advisory Panel (DAP) and Public Art Advisory Panel (PAAP) members. From July to December 2025, the subcommittee met on 5 occasions to review and advise on the development of the project scope. The outcomes of the sub-committee were also shared with the full DAP twice. The project scope considers the site constraints and opportunities and is informed by the principles of the Town Hall Public Domain Plan and The Public Space Public Life Study 2020 by Gehl Architects.
 11. In September 2025, the City commenced the procurement processes for the engagement of consultants to provide services for the delivery of Town Hall Square, including a Head Design Consultant and sub-consultant team - as outlined in a separate report. The Head Design Consultant will develop the project scope into a concept design and documentation for construction.
 12. In November 2025, via a Notice of Motion, Council requested the Chief Executive Officer:
 - (a) commence the process for exploring naming Town Hall Square using a local Aboriginal language word in line with the principles and guidance on Aboriginal place naming set out in the City's Naming Policy, in consultation with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and the City's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel; and
 - (b) bring a report to Council outlining the proposed name and its justification.
 13. The City has now commenced the process for exploring naming Town Hall Square using a local Aboriginal language word in line with the principles and guidance on Aboriginal place naming set out in the City's Naming Policy.

The Site

14. The Town Hall Square site is located opposite Sydney Town Hall and is bounded by George Street to the west, Park Street to the north and Pitt Street to the east.
15. The site of the future Town Hall Square is defined in the Sydney Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2012, refer Attachment A. The land is protected by clause 6.18 to:
 - (a) prevent additional overshadowing of valued public spaces that are used as areas for passive recreation by the public, workers and visitors in Central Sydney, and
 - (b) protect significant, new and planned public places from overshadowing.
16. The site includes the properties 532-540 George Street, 542-544 George Street, 546-552 George Street, 5-7 Park Street, 295-301 Pitt Street, 303-305 Pitt Street and 307 Pitt Street.

17. The City has acquired 6 of the 7 buildings required for the development of Town Hall Square. The City has commenced the compulsory acquisition process for all required interests in Lot 13 in Deposited Plan 80276 (Folio ID 13/80276), known as 542-544 George Street, Sydney to facilitate the acceleration of the Town Hall Square project.

Recommended Project Scope

18. Following detailed review of the site opportunities and constraints and with advice from a subcommittee of DAP and PAAP members the project scope has been developed. The project scope has been informed by the principles of the Town Hall Public Domain Plan and The Public Space Public Life Study 2020 by Gehl Architects.

19. The overall objectives for the project are:

- (a) A civic space (Sydney's civic heart) - Provide a significant public space for Sydney. The civic and public centre of the city.
- (b) A space for everyday life and events - Comfortable spaces with flexible seating, active edges and essential infrastructure to support everyday life, events, public gatherings, protests and celebrations.
- (c) Increasing City greening - New significant trees (deep soil) to mitigate exposure sun conditions and contribute to canopy / greening targets.

20. The project scope includes:

Demolition of the existing buildings and interface works

- (a) Demolition of all 7 buildings within the site including the removal and/or remediation of their basements to return to at-grade - The project will require investigations to resolve geotechnical constraints, plan the demolition and engineering works accurately and design a foundation system for the square. These investigations will also enable proper planning of the works. The works will include locating underground utilities and services to prevent damage during demolition and design for any required utility relocation, augmentation and diversions required.
- (b) Interface works to the site's boundaries including utilities and adjacent properties - The project will develop appropriate repair, remediation, and treatment strategies for adjoining buildings, if and as required depending on the outcome of relevant investigations.

New public square

- (c) New public square (of approximately 4,200sqm) with high quality paving - The square will prioritise open, uncluttered, flexible public space. The design will maximise the visual and physical extent of the public space by considering the relationship to existing footpaths and road carriageways on adjacent streets including George Street, Sydney Square, and the City beyond. Its key relationship with Sydney Town Hall should be considered and celebrated through careful alignment, symmetry and scale.

- (d) Public domain furniture, lighting and associated infrastructure to accommodate everyday activities and large public gatherings / events - The square will provide well designed, flexible and adaptable public space and should function in a range of modes for a variety of user groups. The square will provide a variety of public seating options enabling people to sit in sun or shade as seasonally desirable.
- (e) Improvement works to the southern edge of the site to ensure adequate activation and amenity for everyday use - The project will provide a suitable design response to the southern edge to ensure adequate quality, activation and amenity for everyday use of the square (noting that a building does not form part of the scope).
- (f) Development of a site specific Public Art Strategy will be led by the City in consultation with the City's Public Art Advisory Panel. The delivery of this transformative project will create a stage for public life and enable the delivery of the outcomes identified in the site specific Public Art Strategy.

City Greening

- (g) Retention of existing street trees (where possible) - Existing trees along Park Street will be reviewed and a strategy for tree retention will be developed to support the square.
- (h) New trees in deep planting zones with sufficient soil volumes - The project will provide trees to ensure shading and amenity in the Square. New significant trees will be located to mitigate exposed conditions, provide spatial definition and human scale to the square. The location of new trees must allow for flexibility and be coordinated with the functional needs of the square.

21. Works excluded from the project scope are:

- (a) Construction of any buildings, basements or public toilets.
- (b) Underground pedestrian connection to the Sydney Metro, Town Hall Station and/or QVB.
- (c) Works to 309 Pitt Street (Council does not own the majority of lots within the strata plan of that building).

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

- 22. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 3 - Public places for all - The future Town Hall Square addresses a shortfall of public gathering places at the heart of our city.

- (b) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - refurbishment of the square will lift its design quality to match that of George Street, Sydney Town Hall and St Andrew's Cathedral.
- (c) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - The future Town Hall Square will provide access to Town Hall Station, Gadigal Metro Station and the light rail. Improving legibility and access will benefit both the square and the stations.
- (d) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - The future Town Hall Square will provide infrastructure for public gatherings, such as events, markets, civic celebrations and other cultural activities. It also has the potential be a place of respite in a busy city environment. An adaptable square design will create the opportunities for multi-layered public occupations.

Organisational Impact

23. Delivering Town Hall Square will provide additional public domain, furniture and canopy. These assets will require additional staff and ongoing maintenance.

Risks

24. This is a large and complex project located in the heart of central Sydney. Project and design safety risk assessments will be continuously reviewed and updated through the life of the project in consideration of the principles in the City's risk appetite, which states that:
- (a) We are open to taking risks that align with our strategic objectives and are within our capacity to manage effectively.
 - (b) We encourage a culture of responsible risk taking to support innovation, excellence and continuous improvement.
 - (c) We identify and evaluate emerging risks to ensure timely and appropriate responses.
25. Key project risks include:
- (a) There is significant state-owned transport infrastructure running adjacent to 3 of the site boundaries with light rail and heavy rail lines running along George Street (above and below ground), the cross-city tunnel running below Park Street and bus routes and bus stops along park street, and the metro running below Pitt Street. In August 2025 City staff commenced consultation with Transport for NSW, and regular meetings have been established.
 - (b) The site is a bustling transport intersection located in the heart of central Sydney. There is a need to identify and proactively manage the risks associated with the demolition and construction of a project of this scale and complexity. In September 2025 the City commenced the engagement of services to provide advice on Buildability Scheduling Construction logistics for the project. This includes buildability analysis, construction logistics, time control, detailed programming and strategic project advice.

- (c) The existing buildings, due to their age, require careful investigations for hazardous materials before undertaking any demolition. The original buildings have been modified numerous times over the years with materials of varying composition. The City will be undertaking intrusive hazardous material investigations prior to demolition, in consultation with the consultant team and in accordance with all applicable environmental and work health and safety requirements.
- (d) There are multiple services and associated assets surrounding the site. Careful investigation is required to understand their impact for the design and delivery of the project. In December 2025 the City commenced the engagement of services to provide a detailed topographical survey, services survey, undertake ground penetrating radar and service location trenching.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 26. The delivery of Future Town Hall Square creates increased opportunities for community enjoyment and enables public gatherings and cultural experiences in a city where public space is in great demand.
- 27. High quality public domain including pedestrian links and recreational spaces has a positive effect on the health of workers and residents.

Environmental

- 28. The development of the precinct is aligned with the City's leadership in environmental sustainability and climate action through maximising tree canopy and greening linkage improvements between city, parklands, and harbour.

Economic

- 29. Delivery of the Town Hall Square project is identified in the Sydney LEP 2012 and City Plan 2036 as a key public space.
- 30. The existing retail and office space that will be lost as a result of this project are considered in the Sydney LEP 2012 and City Plan 2036. The delivery of a high quality public space and amenity at the heart of the City will be key contributors to the competitiveness of the City to do business and attract investment.

Financial Implications

- 31. The FY26 Long Term Financial Plan includes an allocation of \$150 million for the construction of Town Hall Square, as well as costs associated with the termination of existing leases and funds to acquire the remaining property.

Relevant Legislation

32. Project delivery will be in accordance with relevant planning and approval legislation and regulations, including the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW) and Roads Act 1993 (NSW).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

33. Current program dates are:

(a) Concept development	Early - mid 2026
(b) Lodge Development Application	End 2026
(c) Documentation	End 2026 - mid 2027
(d) Demolition commences	Early 2028
(e) Completion	Early 2031

Public Consultation

34. Extensive community consultation and engagement was undertaken as part of Sustainable Sydney 2030 and Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision and with key stakeholders on the Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan.
35. In 2007 consultation commenced for Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision. It included 5 big moves, Big Move 1, A revitalised City Centre at the heart of global Sydney offering “A central spine and three major squares to provide a focus for public life in the City Centre”.
36. In 2018, an extensive consultation commenced to refresh the Community Strategic Plan and extend the vision for Sydney to 2050. “A city for people” encapsulated the overall sentiment expressed throughout the consultation. The consultation found that people want: “a city where locals and visitors can gather at cultural events to celebrate the diversity of our community and the beautiful outdoor spaces of the city” – Sydney 2050 Insight Report.
37. In 2022, Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision was exhibited for feedback. The refreshed vision included a new public space in the civic heart of the city. The 3 linked city squares concept was the third most supported transformative idea after “a green city” and “housing for all”. Submissions supported projects that continue to transform the city centre.

38. In 2025, the Community Strategic Plan was publicly exhibited. Community sentiment emphasised providing safe and accessible public spaces that foster social connections and accommodate diverse needs, from families to older adults, showing that the three linked city squares concept continues to be a priority for the community.
39. The community comments and themes have helped inform the project scope.
40. Public consultation will be undertaken as part of the development of the concept design for the square and during the planning approval process for the project. Engagement to support the project has been mapped out over 3 phases:
 - (a) Engage on the vision including online information and survey, pop-up stands on George Street, letters to local businesses, land owners and residents and briefings with stakeholders.
 - (b) Seek formal feedback on the design through the exhibition of the Development Application.
 - (c) Work with businesses and the community to minimise construction impacts.
41. Consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community will be led by the City in consultation with the City's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel and the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. The consultation will inform the overall project vision and identify practical outcomes which might include: economic and social outcomes for First Nations people, opportunities for cultural interpretation and / or adopting a Designing with Country process.

KIM WOODBURY

Chief Operating Officer

Marcia Morley, Executive Manager Project Development and Delivery

Anna Field, Development Manager