

Project Scope - Belmore Park Renewal

File No: X113032

Summary

This report outlines the proposed scope of works for the renewal of Belmore Park, Haymarket. Belmore Park was identified as a priority in the City's Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy and the Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan, which Council endorsed in 2023. The strategy was developed after hearing from more than 1,150 people who contributed to the community's vision for the precinct.

The project brief is to revitalise the park to create a vibrant and welcoming open space in the heart of the city that is inclusive and accessible, while representing the unique and diverse cultural heritage of the area and local community. The project scope includes an increase in green space by reducing the overly complex path network, new lighting, additional seating, revitalisation of the turf, new irrigation to support new turf health, and re-imagining of the bandstand.

A draft concept plan was on public exhibition from 9 March to 6 April 2026. The community consultation process included exhibition on the City's website, letters distributed to the local area and several pop-up sessions held in the park at different times of day.

The exhibited park renewal works include a simplified pathway network to improve movement through the park and increase the useable lawn area. New irrigation will be implemented to support ongoing turf health. The bandstand structure will be re-imagined as an all-ages play space for the community to enjoy, as the existing bandstand is dilapidated and not accessible. Performances in the park will be enabled by the creation of a new gathering space, which will be universally accessible and provide the infrastructure to accommodate music, dance, protest and other activities. This new space also provides additional seating accessible from the pathways, while new lighting throughout the park will improve nighttime safety and user experience.

This report recommends that Council endorse the proposed scope of works for the renewal of Belmore Park, Haymarket.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council endorse the project scope for the renewal of Belmore Park, Haymarket, as described in the subject report and shown in the Concept Plan at Attachment B to the subject report, for progression to relevant approvals, preparation of construction documentation, tender and construction.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Location Plan and Site Photos
- Attachment B.** Concept Plan
- Attachment C.** Belmore Park Community Engagement Report
- Attachment D.** Schedule of Submissions and Responses

Background

1. Belmore Park is a 2.1ha public open space, located on the eastern edge of Chinatown, opposite Central Station. The park is bound on its eastern and western edges by high embankments that support road, light rail and heavy rail. The park is currently in poor condition with assets nearing the end of their useful life.
2. The Belmore Park Renewal project is part of Council's Delivery Plan and has a budget of \$18.9 million.
3. The land is Crown Land under management of the City of Sydney.
4. A Plan of Management (PoM) for Belmore Park was adopted by Council in March 2022.
5. The park is currently in need of renewal to ensure its paths and lighting levels are compliant with contemporary standards and codes and to address assets nearing the end of their useful life. The current bandstand also doesn't meet accessibility standards and is fenced off due to its poor condition.
6. The concept design builds on the lessons learnt from the Safer Cities: Her Way project completed in 2024 undertaken as part of a grant for TfNSW. This project aimed to improve the perception of safety for women and girls in public spaces. By improving lighting, increasing activation and strengthening local character, perceptions of safety were improved. The design team has incorporated these principles into the new design.

Concept Plan and Scope of Work

7. Council staff, in collaboration with external heritage professionals and supported by Council's Design Advisory Panel have developed a concept design for the park renewal.
8. The key principles for the renewal are:
 - (a) Improve quality and openness of park spaces: removal of underutilised pathways to expand green spaces and create larger park spaces.
 - (b) Organise pedestrian and cyclist movements: simplified pathways and a clearly marked shared zone will improve movement through the park and reduce clashes between pedestrians and cyclists.
 - (c) Encourage activation during the day and night: a new community gathering space, all-ages play space and better event infrastructure provide more reasons to come and stay in the park, whether it's for events, performances, rallies or just day-to-day use.
 - (d) Increase seating and amenity: install new accessible bench seats in the park that offer a variety of opportunities for people to sit in shade and sun. New seating walls are proposed on the sloped park edges to provide places for people to sit overlooking the park.

- (e) Improve night-time safety: the replacement of existing park lighting with new standard light poles along pathways and the inclusion of creative lighting to the play space will provide a safe and inviting night-time experience.
 - (f) Enhance the quality of park entries and edges: widening of park entries and new stone walls improve park entries and sightlines into the park.
9. The proposal described in Attachment B includes the following:
- (a) Simplified and upgraded pathways
 - (b) Upgraded lighting throughout the park
 - (c) Increased and improved green spaces and gardens
 - (d) Additional improved park furniture that is directly accessible from a path
 - (e) A new community gathering space
 - (f) Removal of the existing bandstand
 - (g) Interpretation of the bandstand as a play space
 - (h) New irrigation to lawn and garden areas
 - (i) Provision of power throughout park for events
 - (j) Updated shared zone markings on eastern pathway to manage pedestrian and cyclist movements through park.
10. The proposal is based on extensive research and consultation with internal stakeholders and external professionals.
11. The proposal has been discussed with Council's First Nations leadership team and Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.
12. The proposal has been discussed with Council's Homelessness team.
13. The proposal has been presented to Council's Design Advisory Panel (DAP) on two occasions, 4 September 2025 and 12 February 2026.
14. The history of Belmore Park has been studied in detail and the reasoning for the proposed changes is set out below.

15. The layout and extent of Belmore Park have changed significantly since being dedicated for public recreation on 19 May 1868. The park originally extended to Elizabeth Street to the east. Since gazetted, there have been changes to the path network, a tram line was introduced then subsequently demolished, air raid trenches were constructed and demolished, and most significantly, the construction of the railway network severely truncated the eastern extent of the park.
16. The eastern pathway of Belmore Park is currently a Shared Path for cyclists and pedestrians. There is a clear point of conflict between these uses at Eddy Avenue and this issue has been a common theme throughout the community consultation.
17. The existing bandstand is proposed to be removed for several reasons. Firstly, the original 1910 structure has been heavily modified from its original configuration. The base was altered in the 1960s to raise its height and create a toilet and storage facility within (now disused and non-compliant with current standards). The original roof tiles have been replaced. The original stair has been demolished, as has the original handrail. The remaining fabric is in very poor condition, and temporary steel supports prop up the roof. The bandstand is currently fenced off due to its poor condition.
18. Secondly, the bandstand originally sat in the middle of the park. When the railway viaduct was constructed, the park lost a large section of its eastern side, leaving the bandstand in its current location against the railway structure. From a heritage perspective, the current location is not in keeping with its original intent as a focal point for the park.
19. Thirdly, reconstructing the bandstand to its original design would require the complete demolition of the existing structure and re-building with new materials. Council's Design Advisory Panel and heritage staff, as well as our external heritage advisor do not support this approach.
20. Fourthly, demolition and reconstruction would endanger a significant tree, the rare *Meryta denhamii* (endemic to New Caledonia) likely sourced by former Royal Botanic Gardens Director Charles Moore and part of the early park planting.
21. Finally, a reconstructed bandstand would still be inaccessible to people with mobility issues, which is not equitable or in accordance with our own Inclusive and Accessible Public Domain Policy.
22. Therefore, on balance, this report recommends that the function of the bandstand should be transferred to the new community gathering space which will be fully accessible. The form of the original bandstand will be celebrated through an interpretive play structure, which will be decoratively lit to accentuate its heritage silhouette.
23. The inclusion of an all-ages play space (for children, youth, adults and seniors) to reflect its inner-city urban demographic is identified as being desirable in this location as opposed to a playground catering only for children. The 2016 Open Space and Recreation Needs Study highlighted the lack of play opportunities in the city centre. The draft Study currently in preparation also identifies the need for additional city centre play opportunities for a broader age profile.
24. It is proposed that performances will be accommodated in a new multipurpose, accessible gathering space to the south of the existing bandstand.

25. The new community gathering space is conceived as a fully accessible, stage-like space terracing down into the park, creating a natural area for seating and watching performances. The gathering place will have infrastructure to support bands, protests, and night-time activity, ensuring the useful hours of the park are extended well into the evening.
26. In consultation with the internal stakeholder groups the proposed park design can cater for small events and markets, if desired.
27. Homelessness services that currently use the park will continue to do so in the new design. We are not proposing to provide additional power or sewerage services.
28. Belmore Park is a heritage listed park containing many mature, well-established trees across much of the site. A large number of these trees are listed on the City's Register of Significant Trees and are recognised as important assets under the Greening Sydney Strategy.
29. Provision of an urban billabong or water play area has been considered by the project team. Establishing an urban billabong would require excavation and disturbance of existing ground levels, which would likely impact these trees—features that are highly valued by the community. Instead, the plan aims to enhance biodiversity by increasing locally native species and strengthening habitat connectivity, with additional measures, such as nesting boxes, to be considered during the design development phase.
30. A Development Application will be lodged for the proposed works, which will provide the community with another opportunity to comment on the refined design.
31. A Statement of Environmental Effects (SEE) will accompany the Development Application for the works in accordance with the Environmental Planning Assessment Act 1979 and the State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

32. 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 plan is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the proposal increases lawn area and retains significant trees within the park supporting the City's urban greening strategy to increase green and canopy cover.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the project aims to create an inviting, clean and safe public open space during the day and night by upgrading park lighting, additional accessible seating, an all-ages play space and a community gathering space for all to visit and enjoy. The project also opens opportunities to strengthen connections with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture through the design and use of these spaces.

- (c) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - the project simplifies the pathway network to improve the way pedestrians and cyclists move through the park.
- (d) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - the proposal includes additional community spaces with the provision of power and wider paths to allow for cultural and creative events to take place.

Organisational Impact

- 33. Renewing Belmore Park will improve the quality of existing Council assets and mitigate risk to the City by repairing deteriorated park elements. The asset will require ongoing maintenance which will be factored into the LTFP. Additional uses of the park for community activations and other uses may also require additional organisational resources and this will need to be considered at the time of applications for such uses.

Risks

- 34. The risk of not implementing the scope of works includes further deterioration of the parks condition including pathways, edging, turf areas, non-compliant lighting, increased operational costs, reactive repairs and the requirement to fence off or remove assets presenting a risk.
- 35. This approach is within the City's risk appetite, which states:
 - (a) We acknowledge the diverse expectations of our stakeholders, including the community, ratepayers, regulatory bodies and elected officials. Our risk appetite considers stakeholder expectations and seeks to align infrastructure management practices with their needs, while maintaining a responsible and sustainable approach.
 - (b) We acknowledge our responsibility to protect and enhance the social and environmental wellbeing of our community. Our risk appetite emphasises the integration of sustainable practices into infrastructure asset management, considering environmental impacts, climate change resilience and community engagement.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 36. Located on Gadigal land, Belmore Park and the broader Central Precinct is significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a place of convergence where meru (pathways or travelling/trading tracks) meet. Central Station, directly opposite the park, is a site of known Aboriginal employment with the development of the Railways from 1849 through to the 1960s. Belmore Park has been a meeting place for Aboriginal people coming to the city including members of the stolen generations looking to reconnect.
- 37. Belmore Park is connected to the diverse Asian communities in Haymarket. It has hosted numerous Lunar New Year events and connects to Chinatown and the precinct identified as Thaitown centred around Campbell Street.

38. Belmore Park, in more recent history, has played an important role as a place for social and cultural events. It holds significance to a wide range of communities within the Greater Sydney area that have participated in cultural activities or rallies highlighting social issues affecting First Nations, LGBTQIA+ communities, climate change, and various international conflicts.

Environmental

39. Increasing green spaces is in line with the City's Greening Sydney Strategy.
40. Irrigation is linked to the Environmental Strategy 2025-20; it helps support turf health and will be designed to ensure efficient water use.
41. Additional trees are being planted and significant trees retained as part of the work, supporting canopy coverage targets set out in the Greening Sydney Strategy and Urban Forest Strategy.

Financial Implications

42. There are sufficient funds in the 2025/26 capital works budget and forward estimates to complete the works included in this project
43. The approved total project budget for the Belmore Park Renewal is \$18.9M.

Relevant Legislation

44. Crown Land Management Act 2016. The requirements under the Crown Land Management Act have been complied with.
45. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.
46. Heritage Act 1977.
47. State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021.
48. Disability Discrimination Act 1992.
49. Native Title Act 1993.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

50. Current Program Dates:

(a) Council consideration of Concept Design	May 2026
(b) Planning Approval	Late 2026
(c) Design Consultancy procurement	Mid 2027
(d) Detailed Design	Late 2027

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| (e) | Construction Contractor procurement | Mid 2028 |
| (f) | Construction Start | Mid-Late 2028 |
| (g) | Completion | Mid 2030 |

Options

51. Proceed with the progression of the improvement works as outlined in this subject report including relevant approvals, preparation of construction documentation, tender for construction.
52. Project does not proceed - this option is not recommended as the park needs renewal.

Public Consultation

53. Public consultation was undertaken for the concept design. For a detailed description of the consultation process and findings refer to Attachment C.
54. The public consultation involved the following:
 - (a) A webpage on Sydney Have Your Say showed the concept design from 9 March 2026 to 6 April 2026. The page was visited 2002 times during the consultation period. The page included an electronic copy of the concept design and survey which were both available in Thai and simplified Chinese. The concept design was downloaded 763 times during the consultation period (715 in English, 35 in simplified Chinese and 13 in Thai).
 - (b) The consultation was included in the Sydney Your Say e-newsletter to 3,997 subscribers.
 - (c) A letter was posted to owners, residents and businesses in properties surrounding the park, inviting them to give feedback on the proposal, 5,522 letters were distributed.
 - (d) Three pop-ups in the park were held at different times of day where people could share their views and talk to the design team.
55. We received 162 submissions: 139 surveys including 25 in Thai; 22 emails and one phone conversation. A range of businesses and community organisations provided feedback including Chinese Australian Historical Society, Thaitown Business and the Thai Community Association, Chinatown Action Committee, Orange Sky Australia, Link Up, St Vincent de Paul and BIKEast.
56. Overall, the proposed concept design for Belmore Park received very strong support with 92% of survey participants selecting support or strongly support in response to the question: 'Overall, do you support the proposed improvements to Belmore Park?'

57. Consultation participants were asked in the survey to what extent they supported the primary elements of the proposed design - all elements received strong support:
- (a) new lighting on main paths (97% Support/Strongly support)
 - (b) simpler path network and upgraded surfaces (94% Support/Strongly support)
 - (c) more seating (90% Support/Strongly support)
 - (d) larger open lawns and more garden beds (87% Support/Strongly support)
 - (e) new community gathering space (86% Support/Strongly support)
 - (f) the repurposing of the bandstand as a play space (70% Support/Strongly support)
58. Of the 139 survey submissions, 42 identified conflicts between people on bikes and pedestrians as being a priority issue.
59. Council will continue to advocate to Transport for NSW to accelerate the completion of the cycle network on Elizabeth Street to remove this conflict.
60. Since the community consultation the design team, in collaboration with Council's Cycling team, have further developed the design of the Shared Path to improve functionality and mitigate risks identified by the community. These developments will be detailed in the Development Application at a later date.
61. Refer to Attachment D for a detailed discussion of the City's responses to the main issues raised in the consultation.

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