

Knowledge Exchange Grant - Committee for Sydney - Night Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross

File No: X034280

Summary

In 2013, Council adopted the OPEN Sydney Strategy and Action Plan, which outlines five goals to achieve the vision for Sydney at night being: Global, Connected, Diverse, Inviting and Safe, and Responsive. One of the key aspirations of the plan was for local-led good governance and coordinated action among stakeholders to activate key night-time precincts across the local government area.

The devastating impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have forced the temporary shutdown of Sydney's night-time economy. It is critical the City supports the nightlife industry to position itself well for recovery, particularly in areas like Kings Cross that have been previously significantly impacted by the NSW Government's lockdown laws which are due for review in less than 12 months.

The Kings Cross area has a colourful history as Sydney's red light and entertainment district with a bohemian culture. High levels of alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour resulted in increases in liquor licensing regulations and the area's night-time economy lost its identity, with remaining businesses struggling to attract new audiences, a situation compounded by the current pandemic.

An application for sponsorship under the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship Program has been received from not-for-profit advocacy organisation, Committee for Sydney, to deliver a Night-Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross.

Committee for Sydney is an independent not-for-profit thought leadership organisation that champions Sydney as Australia's global city and economic powerhouse. They have a strong track record of developing innovative ideas and solutions to policy challenges in Sydney. Their leadership will be critical to influence the local business community to take ownership over their area and realise a new vision for the precinct.

In collaboration with the City, Committee for Sydney will partner with Ethos Urban, the Kings Cross Liquor Accord and Potts Point Partnership to deliver the project. It will convene key business and community stakeholders in Kings Cross to develop a report, including precinct vision and recommendations, to enhance the attraction and safety of the area at night.

The Night-Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross will help position the area for recovery and build upon the existing work of the City's strategic planning team, enabling the local community to further input into a collective vision for the area's nightlife. The project will establish a local-led governance framework and enhance the skills and knowledge of the local business community to deliver coordinated actions for development of a diverse nightlife that attracts local, domestic and international visitors back to the area.

The application has been evaluated and support of \$40,000 cash is recommended for sponsorship of this project from June 2020 to June 2021. The Committee for Sydney and Ethos Urban have each committed to contributing \$20,000 in-kind support to the project to match the City's funding.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve a cash sponsorship of \$40,000 (excluding GST) to The Committee for Sydney Incorporated for the Night-Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross Project; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate and enter into the sponsorship agreement with Committee for Sydney for the project described in clause (A).

Attachments

Nil

Background

1. In 2013, Council adopted the OPEN Sydney Strategy and Action Plan, which outlines five goals to achieve the vision for Sydney at night being: Global, Connected, Diverse, Inviting and Safe, and Responsive.
2. An application for sponsorship under the Knowledge Exchange Sponsorship Program has been received from not-for-profit advocacy organisation, Committee for Sydney, to deliver a Night-Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross.
3. In collaboration with the City, Committee for Sydney will partner with Ethos Urban, the Kings Cross Liquor Accord and Potts Point Partnership to deliver the project. It will convene key business and community stakeholders in Kings Cross to develop a report, including precinct vision and recommendations, to enhance the attraction and safety of the area at night.
4. Sponsorship of the Committee for Sydney to deliver the Night-Time Precinct Vision for Kings Cross project meet the objectives of the City's OPEN Sydney Strategy and Action Plan through alignment with a number of actions:
 - (a) Action 1.2 Good Governance and Coordinated Action - the project will deliver a governance framework for the precinct that will establish local-led coordinated action and collaboration between key stakeholders and the business community.
 - (b) Action 2.1 Connected transport - the project will propose a precinct vision for Kings Cross that will help to further advocate for better transport at night.
 - (c) Action 3.1 Diverse Options and Action 3.2 Diversity and Planned Growth - the project will be focused on the development of diverse offerings which do not primarily rely on the sale of alcohol and advocate for more nuanced liquor licensing saturation provisions to be developed in legislation.
 - (d) Action 5.3 Precinct Action Plans - the project will set the vision, governance framework and recommendations for the local business community to work together and coordinate actions that attract visitors back to the area.

Kings Cross History

5. Kings Cross has a long history as Sydney's red light district and has a unique cultural identity and character. The area was previously a popular late night trading entertainment precinct, with a global reputation that attracted local and international visitors alike. Comprising the main retail strip of Darlinghurst Road and Macleay Street, the area has a variety of retail and commercial businesses, bars, restaurants, health services, community facilities and tourist and visitor accommodation.
6. The area has previously experienced the highest number of incidents of alcohol related violence and anti-social behaviour in Sydney, due in part to the disproportionately high density of late night trading licensed premises. Currently, the Kings Cross Entertainment Precinct has 86 liquor licences within an area of approximately 0.15 kilometres square. The City has been working to manage the impacts of the increasing cumulative impact of licensed premises in Kings Cross since 2007 with the adoption of the Late Night Trading Development Control Plan.

7. There have been a series of amendments to licencing legislation and regulations applied to venues within the Kings Cross Entertainment Precinct since 2009 to reduce alcohol-related violence. These include:
 - (a) The Liquor Amendment (Temporary Licence Freeze) Act 2009 first introduced a freeze on the issuing of new liquor licenses in Kings Cross from October 2009, initially applying until June 2010. The freeze, with only minor amendments, has applied in the Kings Cross area since that time.
 - (b) The Liquor Amendment (Kings Cross Plan of Management) Act 2013: Introduced precinct-wide temporary and long term banning orders for troublesome patrons and mandatory use of linked ID scanners for high risk venues (trade after midnight with more than 120 patrons) to support enforcement of the banning orders.
 - (c) Liquor Amendment Act 2014: Establishment of 1.30am lockouts and 3am last drinks for the majority of licensed premises located in Kings Cross, a 10pm closure of bottle shops and the introduction of temporary and long term precinct-wide banning orders for violent offenders.
8. These provisions were refined and amended through a series of changes over the following years. The NSW Government response to the 2019 Parliamentary Inquiry into Sydney's Night Time Economy Report led to removal of the 'lockout laws' and other measures from the Sydney CBD Entertainment Precincts, but not the Kings Cross Precinct, which is to be reviewed in 12 months' time. The liquor freeze is currently set to expire in June 2020 with new saturation zones provisions to be developed.
9. Since the introduction of the 2014 licensing changes including the lockout provisions, there has been a significant decrease in alcohol related non-domestic violence assaults at night in the Kings Cross Precinct, from 248 in the 2014 financial year to 72 in 2019 financial year. A review of the five-year trend and average annual percentage change for the precinct reveals a 15 per cent decrease.
10. Since 2014, there have been structural changes to the core night-time economy in Potts Point (postcode 2011), which encompasses the Kings Cross Precinct. These structural changes to the economy, together with the significant reductions in the visitation and ongoing restrictive liquor regulation, have changed the character and vitality of the area as a nightlife entertainment precinct.
11. The City has recently undertaken significant strategic planning, policy and urban design work involving extensive community consultation in Kings Cross, which is ongoing. The proposed project will build upon this work (Late Night Trading Development Control Plan, site specific planning proposals, Darlinghurst Road Development Control Plan and the Open and Creative reforms) and not seek to replicate or replace it, and will further complement current studies and projects.

Committee for Sydney

12. Committee for Sydney is an independent not for profit thought leadership organisation that champions Sydney as Australia's global city and economic powerhouse. They have a strong track record of developing innovative ideas and solutions to policy challenges in Sydney and are effective in changing the narrative for an area or issue.

13. In collaboration with the City, Committee for Sydney will partner with Ethos Urban, the Kings Cross Liquor Accord and Potts Point Partnership to deliver the project. The Committee for Sydney and Ethos Urban have each committed to contributing \$20,000 in-kind support to the project to match the City's funding. The project will incorporate desktop research to fully understand the policy and planning context to inform stakeholder discussions and community consultation.
14. Four key areas will be examined in relation to a Night-Time precinct vision for Kings Cross:
 - (a) a new positive vision and narrative for the precinct's future;
 - (b) a broad and overarching night-time precinct plan for business in the area;
 - (c) capacity for business and cultural sector growth and job creation in the precinct; and
 - (d) a road map for advocating on key reforms for the area, in particular the removal of the lockout laws.
15. A report will be produced outlining a precinct vision, recommendations that reflect the community's aspiration for the precinct and a governance framework that enables local leadership to coordinate development of the area.
16. The final night-time precinct vision and strategy is proposed to be launched at the end of the 2020/21 financial year by the Committee for Sydney.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision

17. 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 sponsorship is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City - The project looks to create a vision for Kings Cross that enables the entertainment precinct to evolve and support the City's vision for a globally competitive and innovative city that is attractive and safe at night.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Integrated Transport for a Connected City - The project will investigate options for better integrated late night transport and aid in advocating to relevant government agencies for a better connected city at night.
 - (c) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies - The project will support innovative business in the precinct to grow and emerge, resulting in economic and employment benefits locally.
 - (d) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City - The project aligns with the City's Local Strategic Planning Statement vision of Kings Cross as a theatre and performance precinct that supports artists, performers and an ecosystem of innovation and creative expression.

Organisational Impact

18. The Night Time City Manager will work with the Committee for Sydney as the relationship manager to collaborate and assist in the report's outcomes as part of this grant. Members of the Strategic Planning and Urban Design, City Access and City Business and Safety team will contribute to the project as required. This work forms part of these roles within the City already, and there is no additional impact to note.

Risks

19. There is a risk that the project may exceed the 12-month period due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. The relationship manager will liaise with the Committee for Sydney on timelines considering the impacts from the physical distancing requirements arising from the current health crisis.

Social / Cultural / Community

20. The project is reliant on business and community support to ensure the vision and strategy is co-designed and owned by the local community. Cultural and social benefits include the project elevating existing cultural and social assets in the Kings Cross area, which will become focus points of the area's unique future identity.

Economic

21. The support of this project will enable a vision for Kings Cross to be used as an attraction to bring domestic and international visitors back into the area. The project aligns with the OPEN Sydney Strategy by supporting late trading businesses in the Kings Cross entertainment precinct to grow and emerge under a new vision and identity.

Budget Implications

22. This report recommends a total sponsorship amount of \$40,000 cash excluding GST.
23. The grant will consist of two payments, \$35,000 (excluding GST) in the 2019/20 Financial Year; and \$5,000 (excluding GST) in the 2020/2021 Financial Year, upon receipt of an acquittal report.
24. There are sufficient funds available within the Knowledge Exchange Grants and Sponsorships 2019/20 budget and the forward commitment of \$5,000 will be included in the draft 2020/21 City's grants and sponsorship budget.

Relevant Legislation

25. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides that a council may, in accordance with a resolution of the council, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for exercising its functions.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

26. Subject to Council approval, the recommended project is scheduled to commence in June 2020, with desktop research occurring initially for the first six months (June to December 2020), pending Covid-19. Consultation, collaboration and launch of the project will be undertaken in the first six months of 2021 (January to June 2021).

Public Consultation

27. In delivering the project, the Committee for Sydney will undertake consultation with the local business and resident community, together with key stakeholders such as the Kings Cross Liquor Accord, the Potts Point Partnership, Australian Hotels Association (NSW), Solotel, NSW Police and other community organisations.

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