

Project Definition and Scope - Dixon Street Improvements

File No: X090157

Summary

This report defines the initial scope of work to be included in the Dixon Street improvement project.

The upgrade of Dixon Street was identified as part of the Chinatown Public Domain Plan as a priority project (2010 and 2015), was re-endorsed by Council in October 2021 as part of the Chinatown Public Domain Program Update and Future Priorities, and is supported by the City's Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision.

The project's aim is to reinvigorate Dixon Street as a dynamic space for people, daily life and culture in the heart of Chinatown.

Covid -19 and competition from nearby Darling Square has heavily impacted the area. In response the City has undertaken broad consultation with the community to seek feedback on the overall Haymarket precinct, their specific ideas and input into the upgrade of Dixon Street and is undertaking an economic study and thematic history study.

Proposed scope includes creative lighting overlays, restoration of the Chinatown gates, improved seating, review of public domain elements, improved services to support events and paving treatments - all recognising Dixon Street as the historic centre of Chinatown and its potential as a vibrant public space.

The proposed improvements will support local business by attracting people back to the area as a place to walk, dine, shop, visit and participate in cultural events.

This report focuses on the scope for Dixon Street improvements. A separate report to Council will provide recommendations from the economic study and inform an updated Chinatown Public Domain Plan.

It is also proposed to update the Chinatown Public Domain plan in response to community engagement as well as significant development proposals such as Central Station / Tech Central Project.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the initial scope proposed for Dixon Street as described in the subject report for progression to design development which will include further engagement through the process;
- (B) note that prior to progression to construction of the works, a Dixon Street concept design and detailed scoping report with financial implications will be prepared for Council approval; and
- (C) note an updated Chinatown Public Domain Plan informed by the Haymarket consultation process with project priorities and opportunities for the Chinatown/Haymarket area will be prepared for Council approval

Attachments

Attachment A. Dixon Street Project Site Plan

Attachment B. Dixon Street Project Definition Plan

Attachment C. Haymarket Vision Engagement Outcomes Report

Background

1. At the meeting on 18 October 2021 Council resolved to progress Dixon Street as a project priority for capital works improvements. This reconfirmed the identification of Dixon Street as a priority project in the 2010 and 2015, Chinatown Public Domain Plan.
2. Dixon Street exists in two parts, extending from Hay Street to Liverpool Street with asset management shared between the City (Dixon Street South, Hay to Goulburn Street) and Placemaking NSW (Dixon Street North, Goulburn to Liverpool Street). Refer Attachment A. The City's custodianship covers the area generally referred to as Dixon Street Mall.
3. Consultation undertaken early 2022 revealed broader consultation and investigation of the Haymarket Area was needed to understand dynamics impacting the precinct and to inform the Dixon Street project.
4. Covid-19 saw a decline in Chinatown's strong international student and visitor presence which has affected local businesses. The success of nearby Darling Square has also impacted the vitality of the area. There are a number of vacant shopfronts on Dixon Street South and the precincts vibrant local economy needs reinvigoration to attract people and support recovery.
5. In response the City has awarded a number of Precinct Activation Grants to support the area and is also undertaking a thematic history study and Haymarket economic study to understand trends and recommend future actions for the City and other agencies to undertake.
6. This work including Dixon Street improvements is informed by a comprehensive community engagement process (refer Attachment C)
7. The outcomes of early consultation (February to March 2022) led to:
 - (a) trimming of trees (July 2022) to let more light into Dixon Street;
 - (b) a chairs in square program (commenced July 2022) to provide additional seating opportunities within the public domain; and
 - (c) investigation of existing non-functional lighting and electrical services to the street

Chinatown Public Domain Plan

8. The Chinatown Public Domain Plan 2010 and 2015 provides a coordinated response to public domain opportunities for streets and public spaces in the precinct, and recommends priorities for the City's capital work program, as well as being a tool to inform public domain works undertaken by government agencies and the private sector. Dixon Street is identified as a priority project within the Public Domain Plan.
9. Recent projects that deliver on the objectives of the Chinatown Public Domain Plan have been completed as part of the George Street south pedestrianisation project. These include George and Hay Street pedestrianisation, Ultimo Road and George Street pedestrian improvements and currently underway Hay Street footpath widening between Sussex Street and Harbour Street.

10. An updated Chinatown Public Domain Plan with project priorities and opportunities for the Chinatown/Haymarket area informed by the Haymarket consultation process as well as responding current and future development such as Central Station / Tech Central will be prepared for Council approval.

Dixon Street Improvement Project Objectives

11. Improvements to Dixon Street South will be guided by the following objectives –
 - (a) Attract people back - Dixon Street needs an upgrade to revitalise the space, better facilitate cultural activities, encourage local investment and support local businesses.
 - (b) Celebrate Dixon Streets cultural identity - Dixon Street has a rich history and strong contemporary identity as a centre for Chinese culture, celebrations and cultural activity.
 - (c) Encourage buildings to contribute to street life - A number of Dixon Streets buildings have vacant shopfronts, inactive building edges and businesses closed during the daytime which do not promote a vibrant street life.
 - (d) Balance public space uses - Dixon Street is a 12-metre-wide narrow street which gives the street an intimate character but is also a constraint in how the public space is used and can create conflicts between different functions such as events, markets, outdoor dining, public domain elements and fixed seating within the street.
 - (e) Better connect the precinct - Dixon Street South could be better connected to Dixon Street North, Sussex Street, Darling Square, Thomas and Hay Streets.

Dixon Street Project Scope

12. Community consultation undertaken to date provides strong support for new creative lighting, retaining cultural character and distinctiveness and highlights the important role Dixon Street plays in Sydney's Chinatown as a historic centre and focus for cultural events.
13. The objectives above align with the key themes that have emerged from the community consultation.
14. Upgrades are proposed to the following elements:
 - (a) Restore the Dixon Street / Chinatown Gates (the Gates) - The Gates were constructed in 1980 as a joint project between the City of Sydney and the Dixon Street Beautification Committee. They are an important part of the cultural identity of the area and a study is underway to better understand their significance. The conservation of the Gates is planned as part of the works. This will include restoration of the roof tiles and sculptures, timber beams, marble elements, concrete structures, lion sculptures and new lighting.

- (b) New creative lighting overlay - The existing Dixon Street creative lighting was designed by Peter McGregor, Hassell and Deuce Design as part of a suite of creative lights prior to the Olympics. Known collectively as Haymarket Lights, components included 'Heaven' (a suspended disc with fibre optic lighting strands) and 'Earth' (inset in paving) at the intersection of Little Hay and Dixon Streets, the 'Dixon Street Light Screens' (polycarbonate light strips) suspended over Dixon Street, Lanterns along Little Hay Street and the Sussex Street Light Screens. The Dixon Street Light Screens are now over 20 years old, no longer functional, incorporate older technology and some have been impacted by trees or taken down due to building maintenance and building renewal. The catenary structure has informally supported lanterns and been used as part of cultural events within the street for many years. The project will progress deaccessioning of the Dixon Street lights and replacing these with a new, programmable creative lighting solution that provides functional, creative and event lighting opportunities. The City will follow the formal deaccessioning process for this element of the works. The City's Public Art and Design Advisory Panel support the deaccessioning of this component of the work to enable a new layer of creative lighting to the street.
- (c) Paving - It is proposed to retain existing City granite paving and provide inserts to provide place distinctiveness for Dixon Street.
- (d) Seating and public domain elements - . bespoke seating opportunities to support social opportunities and reinforce place character.
- (e) Tree management plan to ensure better balance between canopy cover and access to sunlight.
- (f) Lighting and electrical services infrastructure upgrade to improve functional lighting amenity and to support the variety of events and activities which occur on Dixon Street.
- (g) Design exploration of Dixon Street North for further consideration by Placemaking NSW.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

15. 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 program is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 1 - Responsible governance and stewardship - the project improves the City's public domain assets and services, such as lighting and power, that support service delivery and activities by collaborators and partners including the Dixon Street Markets, cultural events and temporary activation projects.
 - (b) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the project will review long term tree management to ensure sustainability and implement environmental actions such as use of robust materials, improved energy efficiency and new programable lighting for functional, artistic and event purposes.

- (c) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the project will balance difference public space uses to support daily life and larger scale cultural activities and events which occur within Dixon Street and the surrounding precinct.
- (d) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - the project recognises the distinctive character and historic importance of Dixon Street to Chinatown through renewed creative lighting, programmable design to facilitate cultural activities, protection, and restoration of the Chinatown Gates.
- (e) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - the project will improve pedestrian amenity and safety by creating an attractive environment for pedestrians to walk and upgraded seating for resting close to a busy public transport interchange.
- (f) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the project recognises the important role Dixon Street plays as the historic centre of Chinatown and creates an environment where diverse communities are welcome and included in cultural celebrations.
- (g) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - the project creates a robust, programmable public space with appropriate infrastructure that can be activated by different uses to attract foot traffic and improve business continuity through various shocks and stresses.
- (h) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - the project includes new lighting with new and distinctive creative programming opportunities, related to the place and identity of the precinct, upgraded seating and services to improves function, amenity and support cultural events.
- (i) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - the project improvements will deliver a welcoming public domain and cultural destination that encourage people to stay and enjoy the City and support a diverse 24-hour economy.

Risks

- 16. Community expectations and demands - risks of not implementing improvements could result in failure to meet community expectations and demands.
- 17. Construction fatigue and business impacts - the Haymarket area has been subject to ongoing public domain upgrades and private development. Dixon Street is currently impacted by construction and building renewal.
- 18. Development timeframes and interface - 413-415 Sussex Street and 82-84 Dixon Street (incorporating Dixon House) are undergoing redevelopment. The timeframes and construction footprint of this development site may impact the delivery of public domain works on Dixon Street.
- 19. It is proposed to further investigate these risks as part of the next phase of the project.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 20. The upgrade of Dixon Street recognises and responds to the historic importance of the street within Chinatown, supports cultural activities which currently occur on the Street and provide new creative opportunities for the street in the future. The distinct identity of Chinatown was a strong theme arising from community engagement and the ability to reinforce this is a key opportunity arising from this project.

Environmental

21. The project will implement environmental initiatives such as:
 - (a) improved technology and energy efficiency of lighting, and
 - (b) dual use of creative lighting for functional, artistic and event programming - reducing impacts in each of these individual modes,

Economic

22. The project will assist to reinvigorate Dixon Street, attract people and business back to the precinct, support local businesses and provide improved amenity within Chinatown for City workers, residents, and visitors.

Financial Implications

23. There are sufficient funds within the 2022/23 capital works budget and future year's forward estimates to deliver improvements to Dixon Street South .
24. Upgrades to Dixon Street North are currently unfunded by the NSW State Government. The proposal covers the development of sufficient work to seek the State's input and partnership to address Dixon Street North.

Relevant Legislation

25. Local Government Act 1993 for procurement.
26. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EPA) (Part 4 and 5 for requirement planning consent approvals).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

27. Key dates for the project are as follows:
 - (a) Tender for design consultant, by end of 2022
 - (b) Tender award, early 2023
 - (c) Approval of concept design, mid 2023
 - (d) Final design and documentation of improvements for Dixon Street South, by end of 2023
 - (e) Construction commences early 2024

Options

28. Do nothing (not recommended) - Not proceeding with improvements to Dixon Street would have a continued negative impact on this important historic street, impact its ongoing function and amenity, and reduce the benefits of public domain revitalisation for the community and local business.
29. Upgrade of elements to Dixon Street South (recommended) - This approach allows for a sensitive series of interventions by the City that improve the overall quality and vibrancy of the street without negatively impacting character or ongoing extensive disruption.
30. Consideration of Dixon Street North (recommended with the support of Placemaking NSW) - This approach enables the upgrade of Dixon Street to be considered as a whole and for Placemaking NSW to further consider improvements to Dixon Street North.

Public Consultation

31. The following consultation has been undertaken -
 - (a) Early Engagement - late 2021, February to April 2022. This included -
 - (i) Engagement with local business owners as part of the George Street South Pedestrianisation project
 - (ii) Engagement with key stakeholders (February 2022) to inform engagement activities
 - (iii) Engagement with businesses on Hay, Thomas and Ultimo Road to gauge interest in outdoor dining once footpath widening complete
 - (iv) Doorknock of Chinatown businesses (March 2022) in Dixon Street, Little Hay Street, and Thomas Street, to seek their feedback on the markets and how Dixon Street could be improved. Further community feedback was sought at a consultation stall at the Dixon Street night markets in April.
 - (b) Community Engagement, 'Have your Say on Future of Haymarket', from 10 August - 21 September 2022. This included -
 - (i) an online survey (in English, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, Indonesian)
 - (ii) a Lord Mayor community forum at Lower Town Hall House on the 24 August 2022
 - (iii) opportunity to comment on Dixon Street via discussion guide
 - (iv) pop-up consultation stands in 5 Haymarket locations
 - a. Dixon Street on 6 September and 16 September 2022
 - b. Thomas Street near Ultimo Road on 6 September 2022
 - c. Campbell Street at George Street near Light Rail stop on 8 September and 16 September 2022

- d. George Street at Goulburn Street near World Square on 13 September 2022
 - e. Pitt Street near Goulburn Street on 15 September 2022
- (c) Discussions with community representatives and groups including the original Chinatown Beautification Committee
 - (d) Emails from community and business groups
 - (e) Consultation with Placemaking NSW on 17 August 2022
 - (f) Consultation with Design Advisory Panel on 1 September 2022
 - (g) Consultation with Public Art Panel on 13 September 2022
32. Key themes arising from consultation undertaken to date identified the following -
- (a) The community had strong feelings of cultural belonging, memories and experiences associated with Dixon Street
 - (b) Improvements to Dixon Street were identified as being very important,
 - (c) Dixon Street considered the traditional heart of Chinatown and an important place for cultural expression and events;
 - (d) Strong support for new creative lighting in Dixon Street and Chinatown overall.
 - (e) need for better seating; and
 - (f) tree management to let more light enter the space.
33. The detailed outcomes of this consultation will inform the brief to design consultants and design consultants will also be given the engagement report to consider as part of their design response. The City will tender for design services to complete the upgrade, seeking teams that demonstrate design, technical and cultural competency so the project resonates with the culture and identity of Chinatown.
34. Consultation will be ongoing through the City's final design and approval process.

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