

Post Exhibition - Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy

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Summary

This report seeks Council endorsement of the Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy (the Strategy) which has been revised following exhibition.

The draft Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy (the draft Strategy) provides a coordinated response to the community vision and evidence-based studies. It identifies actions in five areas:

1. Renewal of the heart
2. Planning and heritage
3. Public domain and public art
4. Culture, events, and activations and
5. Collaboration and partnerships.

The draft Strategy was endorsed by Council for exhibition in August 2023.

The draft Strategy was publicly exhibited alongside the draft Haymarket Public Domain Plan (subject to a separate report) from 22 August to 25 September 2023. A community forum was held with 138 attendees and there were pop-ups on Dixon Street and Campbell Street. In response to the public exhibition, over 350 pieces of feedback were received including 251 survey responses, 76 comments at the events, 31 comments pinned to the interactive map, 26 email submissions and one submission by phone. An engagement report is at Attachment B.

Overall, there was strong support for the draft Strategy. We heard that the revitalisation of Haymarket and Chinatown is important to the community. The area is of deep historical and cultural significance to Chinese, Thai and other Asian communities and the area's success is a source of pride. We also heard that currently the precinct feels run down and is in need of revitalisation. The feedback reinforced the community vision, themes and actions in the draft Strategy. The community feedback also identified other actions (beyond those in the Strategy) that are important to the community.

The following changes have been made to the revised Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy to address the feedback:

Two new actions have been added:

- explore opportunities for community and cultural space; and
- investigate innovation in street cleaning and waste management.

Four actions have been updated:

- share Haymarket and Chinatown's history;
- strengthen the identity of Thai town;
- recognise cultural heritage; and
- identify underutilised and vacant space and engage owners.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the findings from the public exhibition of the draft Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy as described in Attachment B to the subject report, and the City's response to the submissions in Attachment C to the subject report;
- (B) Council adopt the revised Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (C) Council note the budget implications as described in this report and that items will be incorporated into future budgets for public exhibition and endorsement by Council;
- (D) Council note that if the revised Strategy is endorsed, further reports will be brought back to Council for any new grant programs and for any items to be heritage listed; and
- (E) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor amendments to the revised Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy in order to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy (revised)
- Attachment B.** Engagement Report - Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy and Haymarket Public Domain Plan
- Attachment C.** Schedule of Submissions and Responses to the Revitalisation Strategy

Background

1. Haymarket and the CBD South village area is one of Sydney's most iconic precincts and has long been recognised as a focal point for Asian food, culture, and community both locally and internationally. It offers a vibrant and unique urban experience.
2. The precinct is home to significant landmarks including Dixon Street marked by the Chinatown Ceremonial Gates, Paddy's Market/Market City, the Chinese Garden of Friendship and Belmore Park. It is a well-known destination for entertainment and nightlife and is home to the famous Lunar New Year festival and the Friday night markets.
3. The area is of great significance to Chinese Australian communities. Chinese people began arriving in Australia as early as 1818. By the 1930s, Haymarket became the social, cultural, and economic centre for Chinese people in Sydney who were for the most part Cantonese speakers. In the 1980s, the area was coined Chinatown and centred around a newly pedestrianised Dixon Street. Since then, the Chinese population has expanded and diversified, and immigration patterns have shifted, bringing more students and highly educated workers from different regions within China and from other Asian countries.
4. Haymarket is now a diverse Asian precinct, with a distinct Asian Australian identity. This diversity can be seen on the streets through the variety of businesses and activities, as well as the emergence of Thai Town centred around Campbell Street. This diversity is rare in other cities with a well-known and established Chinatown.
5. In March 2020, a Lord Mayoral Minute noted the Covid-19 pandemic was having a disproportionate impact on the Chinatown precinct, and that businesses and restaurants in Haymarket were seeing a significant downturn in trade of up to 80 per cent.
6. Senior business leaders called on the City of Sydney to develop a plan to support the local business community, drive footfall to the Haymarket area and to assist in reducing the spread of misinformation about Covid-19 in the community. The City was asked to investigate:
 - (a) opportunities to assist businesses across the city, such as waiving fees and charges;
 - (b) street attractions and activations, including changes to signage, streetscape and traffic movements in Haymarket to reinvigorate the area and increase foot traffic; and
 - (c) a heritage study for Chinatown which would include assessing the Dixon Street gateways for listing, which are of cultural significance to the Chinese community.

The draft Strategy was informed by extensive engagement and research

7. In response, the following work was undertaken:
 - (a) Haymarket visioning engagement: In 2022, the City carried out a visioning engagement program, with over 1,150 people giving their views about the future of Haymarket. Overwhelmingly, the community would like to see Haymarket become a vibrant and bustling place that celebrates diverse Asian cultures and a place that preserves its history and character while embracing contemporary forms of cultural expression.

- (b) Haymarket and Chinatown Economic and Land Use Study (2023) by Atlas Urban Economics provides a deep dive into the trends and changes affecting the area. The study offers an economic 'health check' of the area, including an audit of ground floor units to understand vacancy levels.
- (c) Chinatown Thematic History (2023) by GML Heritage provides a foundational understanding of the significance of Chinatown and the overarching historical themes to guide future history and heritage work in the area. As part of the preparation of this Thematic History, the City wanted to ensure that the themes responded to the place and its people. As such, community members were asked to give their feedback on the draft Thematic History.

The draft Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy

8. The draft Strategy provides a coordinated response to the community vision and evidence-based studies. It identifies actions in five areas:
 - (a) renewal of the heart
 - (b) planning and heritage
 - (c) public domain and public art
 - (d) culture, events, and activations and
 - (e) collaboration and partnerships.
9. The draft Strategy was endorsed by Council for exhibition in August 2023.
10. Council also resolved that the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate the possibility of creating a Chinatown and Haymarket Community Centre and report back to Council. While the City supports the aspirations of the community, there are no immediate opportunities to create new community space within the City's existing property portfolio. A new action has been added to the Strategy (see below) to explore opportunities to create community and cultural space through future planning proposals, development applications or discussions with landowners. There may also be opportunities for community groups to make more use of existing facilities and spaces (Darling Square Library, Museum of Chinese in Australia, etc).

Public exhibition 2023

11. The draft Strategy was publicly exhibited alongside the draft Haymarket Public Domain Plan (subject to a separate report) from 22 August to 25 September 2023. A community forum was held with 138 attendees and there were pop-ups on Dixon Street and Campbell Street. In response to the public exhibition, over 350 pieces of feedback were received including 251 survey responses, 76 comments at the events, 31 comments pinned to the interactive map, 26 email submissions and one submission by phone.
12. Overall, there is strong support for the draft Strategy. We heard that the revitalisation of Haymarket and Chinatown is important to the community. The area is of deep historical and cultural significance to Chinese, Thai and other Asian communities and the area's success is a source of pride. We also heard that currently the precinct feels run down and is need of revitalisation.

13. The feedback reinforced the community vision and themes in the draft Strategy and Plan. Many people expressed that they look forward to seeing the vision realised.
14. We heard there is support for the actions set out in the draft Strategy. According to the survey, the 10 most important actions are:
 - (a) more pedestrian space and amenity such as social seating and outdoor dining (75 per cent);
 - (b) more creative lighting for safety, colour and atmosphere (70 per cent);
 - (c) more trees and greening (69 per cent);
 - (d) improve the shopfronts in the southern part of Dixon Street through a grant program (61 per cent);
 - (e) encourage the renewal of smaller buildings as a point of difference from the CBD (59 per cent);
 - (f) more grant funding for community-led festivals and events in Haymarket (59 per cent);
 - (g) advocate for the improvement of Paddy's markets, focused on Asian food and produce (58 per cent);
 - (h) investigate vacant building spaces (57 per cent);
 - (i) more spaces and infrastructure for events, markets and gatherings (57 per cent); and
 - (j) more freedom and cultural expression in building signage and lighting (55 per cent).
15. Through the survey, we asked 'what other actions are important to you?' (beyond the actions in the draft Strategy). Respondents most frequently mentioned the following:
 - (a) recognise Chinese history and culture (41 respondents);
 - (b) make it easier to get to and from Haymarket - public transport, cycling, wayfinding, loading, drop off and parking (40 respondents);
 - (c) improve the offering and support businesses (35 respondents);
 - (d) more community spaces and facilities (26 respondents);
 - (e) boost the cultural offering and make it vibrant at night (25 respondents);
 - (f) address vacancy and upgrade buildings (23 respondents);
 - (g) strengthen the identity of Thai town (19 respondents);
 - (h) improve waste and cleanliness (19 respondents);
 - (i) more pedestrian friendly (17 respondents); and
 - (j) expand the markets or have more markets (16 respondents).

16. A full report of the engagement is at Attachment B and the City's response to submissions is at Attachment C.

Recommended changes to the Strategy

17. The following changes are proposed to the Strategy to respond to the engagement and better support the revitalisation of Haymarket and Chinatown.
18. Two new actions have been added to the Strategy:
 - (a) Explore opportunities for community and cultural space: Much of the feedback spoke to a desire for more community and cultural space and activity in Haymarket. Twenty-five respondents mentioned that the cultural and nighttime offer should be boosted, and 26 respondents suggested the need for more community space and facilities. In particular, a few of the submissions spoke to the desire for a new Chinatown community centre which could support cultural activities and bring people together. While the City supports the aspirations of the community, options to create new space are limited. A new action has been added to the Strategy to explore opportunities to work with landowners through future planning proposals and development applications to deliver community and cultural space. There may also be opportunities for private landowners to repurpose vacant or underutilised space.
 - (b) Investigate innovation in street cleaning and waste management: 58 survey respondents commented that the precinct is run-down and needs of revitalisation and 19 respondents specifically mentioned the need to improve waste and cleanliness. A new action has been added to the Strategy to 'investigate innovation in street cleaning and waste management' which could include upgrading equipment to support more efficient cleansing and collection, engaging businesses and trialling alternative solutions for better commercial waste management.
19. Four actions have been updated:
 - (a) Share Haymarket and Chinatown's history: The feedback indicated that people would like to have Haymarket and Chinatown's history told, in a museum, through lived cultural practices, and in the streets (41 survey respondents). In particular, there is a desire for more recognition of Chinese Australian history. Beyond simply 'identify opportunities for more heritage interpretation' this action has been updated to prioritise Chinatown within the City's historical storytelling programs, including the Sydney Culture Walks and Historical Green Plaques programs.
 - (b) Strengthen the identity of Thai town: Through engagement we heard that there is a desire for stronger recognition and visibility of Thai Town through signage, gates, public art, information kiosk or markets (19 survey respondents). An action has been updated in the Strategy to be clearer about the City's intention to strengthen the identity of Thai Town through public domain improvements. This is explored further in the draft Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan (subject to a separate report).

- (c) Recognise cultural heritage: The feedback indicated that there were concerns about potential heritage listing and implications on redevelopment, while there is also the desire for greater recognition of Chinese cultural heritage. This action has been updated to focus on engagement and historic research in the first instance, before determining the appropriate route for recognising cultural heritage, which may be through listing, historic storytelling or interpretation (plaques, walking tours, the building's use, museum curation, etc).
- (d) Investigating vacant space: In the feedback, this action emerged as a high priority, with 144 respondents (57 per cent) saying it is important to them (eighth most important). It was also mentioned by 19 respondents in their comments. People felt that vacant buildings needed to be occupied and rundown buildings needed to be upgraded. Some people suggested that the shop front improvement program be extended beyond Dixon Street. Previously the action in the draft Strategy was to: "review the 2022 Floor Space and Employment Survey data to identify opportunities to utilise vacant upper-level floor space". This action has been expanded to include engagement with landowners and demonstration projects to try to support underutilised space being brought back into active use.

Related actions and activities in Haymarket

- 20. Two of the planning actions in the Strategy are subject to a separate report to Council. Through the engagement we found that 'encourage the renewal of smaller buildings as a point of difference from the CBD' was important to 59 per cent of respondents (fifth most supported) and 'more freedom and cultural expression in building signage and lighting' was important to 55 per cent of respondents (tenth most supported). Amendments are proposed to the Sydney Development Control Plan 2012 as part of a separate report.
- 21. Many actions are already underway or on-going in Haymarket, including:
 - (a) Dixon Street - a public domain upgrade that will include creative lighting, improved seating and event services, and paving treatments. The draft concept was on public exhibition from 18 October to 15 November 2023 and will be the subject of a future report. Works are proposed to start in 2024.
 - (b) A planning proposal to heritage list the Chinatown Ceremonial Gates was on public exhibition from October to November 2023. A post-exhibition report to Council is expected in early 2024. The restoration works are proposed to take place alongside the Dixon Street public domain works.
 - (c) The City has provided an accommodation grant for the creation of the new Museum of Chinese in Australia (MOCA) in the former Haymarket Library building on George Street. The Museum of Chinese in Australia is due to open in 2024.
 - (d) Fees are waived for outdoor dining until 2025.
 - (e) The City produces the annual Sydney Lunar New Year and Lunar Lanes events.
 - (f) The City supports the Friday night Chinatown Markets which are currently in Dixon Street and Little Hay Street.
 - (g) Two Sydney Streets events are organised in Haymarket each year.

- (h) The inaugural SXSW Sydney was held in Darling Harbour and Haymarket in October 2023. The week-long event explores tech, innovation, games, music, screen and culture. It is planned to be an annual event for the next five years.

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 1 - Responsible governance and stewardship - the Strategy draws on evidence to inform decision making. It also directs us towards participatory forms of governance, engaging and partnering with the local community to revitalise Haymarket.
 - (b) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - the Strategy encourages improved performance of buildings through incentivising renewal, increases to tree canopy through public domain improvements and supports a culture of walking, cycling and public transport.
 - (c) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the Strategy together with the revised Public Domain Plan will balance all public space uses and identify opportunities to reallocate road space in response to an increased demand for more space for pedestrian movement and street life.
 - (d) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - the Strategy responds to the distinctive character, history, heritage and iconic places valued by communities in Haymarket.
 - (e) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - the revised Strategy together with the revised Public Domain Plan will improve pedestrian amenity by creating an attractive, comfortable and safe environment with improved connections to a busy public transport interchange.
 - (f) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the Strategy has been informed by extensive community engagement. The Strategy looks to make Haymarket accessible to all by improving public spaces, events and culture and collaboration with the communities.
 - (g) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - the Strategy responds to the diverse communities of Haymarket and identifies opportunities for Haymarket's economy to be diversified, strengthening its resilience.
 - (h) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - the Strategy responds to community feedback and identifies new opportunities for cultural events and activities in Haymarket.
 - (i) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - the Strategy is rooted in a strong understanding of the precinct's economic challenges and advantages and identifies actions to support thriving economic activity.

Organisational Impact

23. The Strategy includes an action to appoint a new Haymarket coordinator for a three-year period to work closely with the community and the City's teams who will progress the actions. There will also be impacts on the teams leading each action, who will need to plan their resources accordingly.

Social / Cultural / Community

24. The Strategy recognises that the area has high social and cultural significance, particularly to Chinese, Thai and other Asian communities. Community representatives expressed a great sense of responsibility for the future of Haymarket and a desire to work together with the City of Sydney. Engaging and partnering with the community will be critical to achieving the desired social and cultural outcomes.

Environmental

25. The Strategy is aligned with the City's environmental actions and strategies. The next stages of work will consider any impacts on environmental outcomes related to potential actions.

Economic

26. The Strategy is underpinned by economic evidence and identifies potential actions to support local businesses, attract investment and to support the vitality of the area through improvements to place quality. The Strategy is in strong alignment with the City's draft Economic Strategy. The funding for the shop front and building front improvement program is recommended to be increased from \$300,000 per year for three years to \$400,000 per year for three years to respond to the expected escalation in construction costs over the life of the program.

Financial Implications

27. Many of the actions are already identified and funded in the City's Capital Works program, like the Dixon Street public domain upgrades, and the existing budgets.
28. Some key aspects are not yet accounted for. These include:
- (a) Dixon Street shopfront (and building front) improvement program – an estimated \$1,200,000 over three years. This estimate has been adjusted to respond to increasing construction costs due to labour shortages and material costs;
 - (b) additional precinct activation funding – an estimated \$600,000 over three years;
 - (c) Haymarket coordinator position for three years; and
 - (d) SXSW Sydney – being an estimated \$100,000 per year.
29. Any future expenditure not currently budgeted for, including for grants programs and staff to support implementation of the strategy, will be subject to future budget and public exhibition processes under the Local Government Act 1993.

30. Improvement schemes would be limited in both time and money to catalyse transformation and introduce changes which become self-sustaining. For example, shopfront improvements would be limited to three years with a total funding cap. These grants would be match-funded by landowners to encourage the reimagining of shopfronts and offers to generate activation and attraction on Dixon Street.
31. Overall, most of the actions for revitalisation in the Strategy can be accommodated within existing budgets and resources, and those with longer lead in times can be factored into future iterations of the City's Long Term Financial Plan.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

32. If the Strategy is endorsed, in Quarter1 2024 it is proposed a further report will be brought back to Council for consideration and public exhibition of the new Dixon Street improvement grant program.
33. Further reports would be brought back to Council in 2024 if any proposed items are recommended for heritage listing.

Public Consultation

34. The following public consultation has been carried out on the draft Strategy:
 - (a) Early engagement - meetings with 23 key stakeholders in June 2023.
 - (b) The City's Design Advisory Panel and the Multicultural Advisory Panel were both briefed on the draft Revitalisation Strategy in August 2023.
 - (c) Public exhibition of the draft Strategy alongside the draft Haymarket Public Domain Plan from 22 August to 25 September 2023, including:
 - (i) community notification letter distributed to 14,709 property owners, residents, and businesses;
 - (ii) e-mailout to 670 registered stakeholders;
 - (iii) door-knocking 28 businesses on Dixon Street;
 - (iv) advertising on community screens throughout the precinct;
 - (v) Sydney Your Say e-news sent to over 7,000 subscribers;
 - (vi) media announcement;
 - (vii) Sydney Your Say web page provided in English, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, and Indonesian, and viewed 1,867 times;
 - (viii) an online survey (in English, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, Indonesian) completed by 251 people;
 - (ix) a Lord Mayor community forum at The Vestibule, Town Hall House on Tuesday 19 September 2023, 6pm to 7.30pm, attended by 138 people;

- (x) two pop-up consultation stands at:
 - a. Dixon Street markets on Friday 8 September from 5pm to 7pm;
 - b. Campbell Street at George Street on Tuesday 12 September from 3pm to 5pm;
 - (xi) an online Social Pinpoint map with 31 comments made; and
 - (xii) 26 email submissions and one phone submission.
35. At the close of the public exhibition over 350 pieces of feedback were received.
36. A full report of the engagement is at Attachment B
37. Prior to this, the following public consultation had been undertaken to develop the draft Strategy:
- (a) Early Engagement - February to April 2022. This included:
 - (i) engagement with key stakeholders (February 2022) to inform engagement activities;
 - (ii) 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; and
 - (iii) a consultation stall at the Dixon Street night markets (April 2022).
 - (b) Community Engagement, 'Have your Say on Future of Haymarket', from 10 August to 21 September 2022. This included:
 - (i) an online survey (in English, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, Indonesian), completed by more than 950 people;
 - (ii) a Lord Mayor community forum at Lower Town Hall House on 24 August 2022, attended by about 110 people; and
 - (iii) pop-up consultation stands in five 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; and
 - e. Pitt Street near Goulburn Street on 15 September 2022.

- (c) To inform the Economic Study, 14 stakeholder interviews were held in Quarter 3 2022, including landowners, businesses, property agents, researchers and public bodies.
- (d) Panel and community consultation on the draft Historic Thematic Study, including two workshops on 20 December 2022 and 17 January 2023 and 13 submissions were made. The revised Chinatown Historic Thematic Study has been updated to respond to this feedback.

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