

Project Scope - Dixon Street Upgrade

File No: X097162

Summary

This report outlines the proposed scope of works for the upgrade of Dixon Street south, Haymarket (Goulburn to Hay Streets). The report recommends that Council endorse the project scope for the Dixon Street upgrade and note the additional funds requiring approval as part of the 2024/25 capital works program to deliver the project.

The proposal for the Dixon Street south upgrade has been informed by numerous engagement activities related to the Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan and Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy as well as specific community engagement on the Dixon Street concept plan in October- November 2023.

Project scope includes catenary creative lighting, overlay paving, new seating and furniture, decorative lanterns, and renewal of infrastructure and electrical services to support events, markets, and other public domain functions.

Cultural expression and recognition of Dixon Street's significance is embedded in lighting, paving and furniture elements.

The design provides clear functional and space definition to support outdoor dining, markets, circulation, and everyday public life.

The majority of City granite paving will be retained, and enhanced with inserts that express place distinctiveness and revitalise the street. New seating will support social opportunities, accessibility, and reinforce place character.

The project scope also includes removal of seven trees to better balance canopy cover and access to sunlight and sky. This is subject to a Tree Preservation Order application and approval permit. Ongoing reduction pruning of remaining trees will be required to maintain building and infrastructure clearances.

Restoration of the Chinatown Gates has been undertaken as a separate scope project and is not subject to this report however, is an integral component and consideration of the Dixon Street upgrade particularly in terms of setting and feature lighting.

Community feedback from the engagement process was broadly in support of the proposal. Community suggestions were considered and, where feasible, have been incorporated into the concept design or form part of design development considerations and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders.

A pre-tender estimate of costs has recently been prepared for the updated scope of works based on feedback from community which indicates additional funding is required for the project.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the scope of works for Dixon Street upgrade as describe in the subject report and as generally indicated at Attachment B to the subject report for progression to detailed design, documentation and construction of works; and
- (B) note the financial implications as outlined in Confidential Attachment D to the subject report.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Project Location Plan
- Attachment B.** Concept Design
- Attachment C.** Engagement Report - Dixon Street Concept Design
- Attachment D.** Financial Implications (Confidential)

Background

1. Dixon Street is considered the traditional heart of Chinatown and is a special place of cultural belonging, experiences, and memories for the community.
2. Dixon Street extends from Liverpool Street to Hay Street however ownership and management exists in two parts. Dixon Street south (Hay to Goulburn Street) is managed by the City, and Dixon Street north (Goulburn to Liverpool Street) is managed by Placemaking NSW.
3. The subject of this scope report is Dixon Street south (Goulburn to Hay Streets).
4. The last upgrade of Dixon Street south was over 25 years ago.
5. Community input was sought to develop A Community Vision for Haymarket (10 August to 21 September 2022). This provided a scope of improvements to inform a design brief, which was endorsed by Council in November 2022.
6. Community feedback on the Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan, endorsed by Council in December 2023, reaffirms Dixon Street south as the top project priority.

Concept Plan Development

7. ASPECT Studios collaborating with experts in cultural and creative design including Sibling Architecture, Studio Yu and Mei, lighting designers Electrolight and supporting technical expertise and have been engaged by the City to undertake design and documentation services for Dixon Street south.
8. The design consultancy also developed a high level concept for Dixon Street north to support Placemaking NSW to formulate a holistic design vision for the entire length of the street and to review the need for improvements in the northern section. Discussions between the City and Placemaking NSW are ongoing however at this stage there is no plans to progress improvements to Dixon Street north.
9. The project aims to revitalise Dixon Street as a dynamic space for people, daily life, and culture in the heart of Chinatown.
10. The project objectives are to:
 - (a) Increase visitation and activation through renewal of the public domain;
 - (b) Support local businesses and encourage buildings to contribute to street life and activation;
 - (c) Celebrate Dixon Street as a place of cultural significance and the historic heart of Chinatown;
 - (d) Provide legible and functional space allocation of public domain uses including outdoor dining, public seating, markets, and circulation; and
 - (e) Strengthen the identity of the precinct through elements that relate to the surrounding context and can be applied to the broader Haymarket and Chinatown area.

Project scope components

11. Project scope components include:
 - (a) A new catenary lighting feature that draws inspiration from traditional lanterns and motifs to provide functional, creative and event lighting opportunities, and to mark gateways.
 - (b) Deaccessioning of the Dixon Street lights including 'Heaven' (a suspended disc with fibre optic lighting strands) and 'Earth' (an in-ground paving artwork) at the intersection of Little Hay and Dixon Streets. The original designers Hassell and Peter McGreggor have been consulted on this approach.
 - (c) The City will follow the formal deaccessioning process for this element of the works. The City's Public Art Advisory Panel supports the deaccessioning of this component of the work to enable a new layer of creative lighting to the street.
 - (d) Retention of most of the existing City granite paving and insertion of a new paving ribbon to express place distinctiveness, highlight key features, and brighten the street.
 - (e) New public seating and furniture to support social opportunities, accessibility, and affordable use of the public domain;
 - (f) Elements and symbols embedded in paving and furniture to reinforce place character, tell stories, and interpret heritage.
 - (g) Retention of the Red Lantern Information Kiosk including artwork "Pao Cha" by Pamela Mei-Leng See, with improved curtilage and seating to support gathering and improve functionality.
 - (h) Upgrade of lighting and electrical infrastructure to improve functional lighting and to support events and activities;
 - (i) Removal of up to seven trees to provide a better balance between canopy cover and access to sunlight, and to improve air flow (refer points 13-19).
 - (j) Flexible space allocation to allow for outdoor dining, markets, festivals and events.
12. Not subject to this scope report, the Dixon Street Ceremonial Gates restoration is being coordinated with the Dixon Street upgrade. Works include restoration of the roof tiles and sculptures, timber beams, marble elements, concrete structures, lion sculptures and new lighting.
13. Not subject to this scope report, two new grant program guidelines were endorsed for public exhibition by Council in February 2024. The Dixon Street Improvement Grant proposes to provide matched funding up to \$60,000 for three years to improve shop and building frontages on Dixon Street. The Haymarket Activation Grant proposes to support one major activation each year for three years in the Haymarket precinct, to the value of \$200,000. Following the public exhibition of the proposed grant program guidelines and consideration of submissions, the grant guidelines will be brought back to Council for approval.

Tree management

14. Dixon Street south contains 16 *Ficus benjamina* (Weeping fig) trees. These trees are not listed in Schedule 5 (Environmental Heritage) of the Sydney LEP (2012) and are not in the City of Sydney Register of Significant Trees (2013).
15. An assessment performed by a consultant arborist estimates the useful life expectancy of the trees as five to 15 years.
16. Community engagement undertaken in 2022-23 identified darkness and lack of views to sky and sunshine as having a negative impact on public perceptions of Dixon Street.
17. Ongoing maintenance and management of the trees is becoming difficult over time due to their branch structure and constrained position, with risks related to the safety of workers and public becoming increasing difficult manage.
18. In response, the publicly exhibited Dixon Street concept proposed the removal of seven *Ficus benjamina* (Weeping fig) trees. This is comprised of three trees between Goulburn and Little Hay Streets that are heavily suppressed by larger adjacent trees, and four trees between Little Hay and Hay Streets for improved sunlight to the public domain.
19. Written responses to the public exhibition indicated a 50/50 split of support for and against tree removal. When asked in survey, 50 per cent of respondents supported tree removal, 39 per cent of respondents were against tree removal and 11 per cent of respondents were neutral.
20. The recently adopted Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan proposes up to an additional 103 trees to be planted in the precinct with expansion of available public domain to establish new tree canopy.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

21. 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 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 aims to increase the amount of flexible public space 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 improve 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

- 22. Required planning application and approval processes may affect project time frames.
- 23. Catenary lighting components will require attachments to private property. It is proposed using attachment locations of the existing lighting scheme however updated signed agreement from the property owners will be required.
- 24. Construction fatigue and business impacts - the Haymarket area has been subject to ongoing public domain upgrades and private development.

Social / Cultural / Community

- 25. 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 as well other projects identified in the Haymarket Chinatown Public Domain Plan 2023.

Environmental

- 26. 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.

Economic

27. 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.
28. The Plan focuses on delivering public domain quality and liveability which has been proven to be a key contributor to the competitiveness of cities to do business and attract investment.

Financial Implications

29. There are funds within the 2023/24 capital works budget and the Long Term Financial Plan for Dixon Street south however additional funding will need to be provided in the 2024/25 Long Term Financial Plan to deliver this project. A summary of the financial implications is included in Confidential Attachment D.
30. Upgrades to Dixon Street north are currently not funded by the NSW Government.

Relevant Legislation

31. Local Government Act 1993 for the procurement of the services and works required for the project.
32. Local Government Act 1993 - Section 10A provides that a council may close to the public so much of its meeting as comprises the discussion of information that would, if disclosed, confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom the council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.
33. Discussion of the matter in an open meeting would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest because it would compromise Council's ability to negotiate fairly and commercially to achieve the best outcome for its ratepayers.
34. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EPA) (Part 4 and 5). A consultant planner will review the scope of works to assess planning consent requirements for the project under the EPA Act.
35. Tree removal may be subject to an application and permit under Section 2.11 of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Biodiversity and Conservation) 2021 and the Sydney Development Control Plan (DCP) 2012 (clause 3.5.3).
36. Roads Act 1993 for any permanent changes to traffic arrangements.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

37. A key interdependency is the Chinatown Ceremonial Gates refurbishment and need to substantially complete these works prior to commencing public domain upgrade works.
38. Enabling works, if required, will be determined during design development. Enabling works might include, for example, investigation works to inform design, tree pruning, electrical infrastructure works and catenary connection point works.

39. Key dates for the project are as follows:
- (a) Dixon Street Gates refurbishment commencement: Mid 2024 (TBC)
 - (b) Approval applications (Review of Environmental Factors and Development Application): Mid 2024
 - (c) Design finalisation: Late 2024
 - (d) Dixon Street Gates refurbishment completion: Early 2025 (TBC)
 - (e) Enabling works commencement; Late 2024 (if required)
 - (f) Tender packages: Early 2025 to Mid 2025
 - (g) Construction: Late 2025 to Late 2026
 - (h) Completion: Late 2026

Public Consultation

40. Early engagement to develop A Community Vision for Haymarket 2022 was undertaken from 10 August to 21 September 2022 and received over 1,150 responses. There was broad agreement about the need to improve Dixon Street, however people emphasised the importance of preserving local character and cultural heritage. People said that the street is dark and would like more lighting installed. They also would like improved cleanliness, increased food and retail offerings, more street furniture, and better pedestrian amenity.
41. Engagement on the draft Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan and draft Haymarket and Chinatown Revitalisation Strategy was undertaken from 22 August to 25 September 2023 and received over 350 responses. People said that Dixon Street was dark and in need of more lighting. There was general support for improved tree management, neon signage, creative lighting, public artworks, cultural motifs, and more seating.
42. A Lord Mayoral Haymarket Forum was held on 19 September 2023 and attended by 138 people, at which the Dixon Street concept plan was presented.
43. This City's Design Advisory Panel were briefed on the Dixon Street concept plan on 31 August 2023 and expressed their support.
44. The draft Dixon Street concept plan was placed on public exhibition from 18 October to 15 November 2023.
45. Consultation activities included:
- (a) Sydney Your Say web page and online survey provided in English, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, and Indonesian, viewed 1,693 times and documents downloaded 435 times;
 - (b) Haymarket precinct web page, viewed 717 times;
 - (c) City of Sydney news story, viewed 614 times;

- (d) A Lord Mayor letter to 8,266 property owners, businesses and residents;
 - (e) Notification email to 494 key stakeholders;
 - (f) Sydney Your Say e-newsletter to 6,760 subscribers;
 - (g) Social media posts;
 - (h) Advertising on QMS panels throughout the precinct and on digital screens at the Darling Square library in English, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Thai, Korean, and Indonesian; and
 - (i) Meetings were held with key stakeholders during the consultation period.
46. At the close of the public exhibition 126 surveys were completed. The most common languages spoken by respondents were English (99 per cent), Mandarin (25 per cent) and Cantonese (17 per cent), with many people speaking multiple languages.
47. 23 submissions from a range of organisations and community members, including Soul of Chinatown, Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University, and Chinese Australian Historical Society.
48. Submissions were supportive of the concept proposal with particular support expressed for:
- (a) Progressing an upgrade of Dixon Street;
 - (b) Inviting new energy through creative lighting. 83 per cent of feedback was very positive or positive.
 - (c) Use of traditional symbols and motifs in paving and furniture. 80 per cent of feedback was very positive or positive.
 - (d) Use of traditional lanterns, which strongly identify the area as Chinatown;
 - (e) Coordination of public domain elements to ensure the street can be used for events and markets, including power supply.
 - (f) Heritage listing of the Chinatown Ceremonial Gates and preservation of buildings and landmarks with heritage or cultural significance.
49. Some respondents suggested adjustments to the current proposed plans. Key points raised in the submissions include:
- (a) The lighting proposal for auspicious clouds could be further refined to reflect traditional styles, elegance, and simplicity, and could include interactivity or light movement.
 - (b) More historic storytelling about the local area, educational signage that explains the meaning behind the designs, and signage in both Chinese and English.
 - (c) Provide the community with greater clarity on the selection criteria for removing trees to make an informed decision. Some felt that Dixon Street is too dark and welcomed more sunlight into the space. Others felt that the trees are a strong feature of the street and provide great summer amenity.

- (d) Expand the use of lanterns throughout Dixon Street, Haymarket and Chinatown.
 - (e) Expand the use of creative lighting throughout Haymarket and Chinatown.
 - (f) Retain the Red Lantern Kiosk rather than returning it to its original open pagoda design.
 - (g) Night markets can be overly congested and could be spread out into different areas of Chinatown.
50. The City's response to key issues raised by the community is summarised below:
- (a) Lighting, furniture and paving have been refined to reflect traditional styles, respond to the desire for more lanterns, and provide more detail on designs.
 - (b) The next stage of design development will continue refinements including cultural motifs to respond to community feedback and fully articulate designs.
 - (c) The Red Lantern Kiosk will be retained, and its setting enhanced to increase public use of the area.
 - (d) Proposals for creative lighting and trees will be flexible and able to work in a scenario where all trees are retained, if required.
 - (e) Suggestions for expanding creative lighting, lanterns and markets to the broader precinct will be considered as part of implementation of the Haymarket and Chinatown Public Domain Plan 2023.
51. Attachment C to the subject report provides details of all feedback received.
52. Ongoing conversations and consultation with stakeholders will continue as part of the design development process ahead of construction.
53. The City will work with the businesses and residents to minimise impacts during construction.

KIM WOODBURY

Chief Operating Officer

Bridget Smyth, City Architect / Executive Manager City Design and Public Art

Laurie Johnson, Program Manager Public Domain Strategy