

Project Scope - Sydney Square Renewal

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Summary

This report outlines the proposed scope of works for the renewal of Sydney Square and the proposed principles for agreements between the City of Sydney (the City) and Sydney Anglican Property (SAP).

Sydney Square is the open public space between Sydney Town Hall, St Andrew's Cathedral, George Street and St Andrews House. The Square was constructed in the 1970's at the same time as Town Hall House and St Andrew's House and is located on land owned by the City and land owned by St Andrew's House Corporation and Anglican Church Property Trust Diocese of Sydney. An operational agreement for the control and management of Sydney Square between the City and St Andrew's House Corporation (now Sydney Anglican Properties, SAP) was last updated on 22 August 1983.

In May 2023 Council endorsed proceeding with the renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square as the next stage of the transformation of Central Sydney and allocated a provisional budget of \$35 million was allocated for the works. The City has worked with SAP to develop a recommended scope of renewal and upgrade works and principles for arrangements to be put in place between the parties for the renewal, use and management of the square.

In February 2025 Council resolved that the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate options to accelerate the delivery of Town Hall Square for Council's consideration as part of the 2025/26 budget that will include a full project scope and costings, and for demolition to start this term. As a result of this resolution, the prioritisation of Town Hall Square has changed and as a consequence it has been necessary to review the proposed Sydney Square project and works are now proposed to be delivered in 2 stages.

A staged delivery is proposed for the renewal of Sydney Square. This report describes the proposed scope for Stage 1 with a project value of \$20 million. Provision for a second stage of renewal works has been made in the Long-Term Financial Plan with an allowance of a further \$15 million in future years.

The proposed scope for Stage 1 includes renewal of the public domain with new paving, lighting, furniture, retaining the existing trees and exploring opportunities for additional greening.

Recommendation

It is resolved that Council:

- (A) endorse the project scope for the renewal of Sydney Square, including proposed works on land owned by other parties, as described in the subject report for the purposes of proceeding with documentation, planning application, and tender for construction works;
- (B) note future Stage 2 works to be developed and undertaken at a later stage (currently estimated as being around 2032);
- (C) note the proposed principles for agreements to be made with Sydney Anglican Property for the development and future operation of Sydney Square as set out in Confidential Attachment C to the subject report, noting that these matters will be the subject of a future report to Council following negotiations between the parties; and
- (D) note the financial implications outlined in Confidential Attachment D to the subject report.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Location Plan
- Attachment B.** Project Scope and Extent of Works
- Attachment C.** Principals of Agreements (Confidential)
- Attachment D.** Financial Implications (Confidential)

Background

1. In 1973, as Town Hall House construction began and plans were finalised for St Andrews House, the City Council and St Andrew's Cathedral jointly developed plans for the delivery of Sydney Square.
2. In 2008, Sustainable Sydney 2030 clearly articulated a vision for 'Three Linked City Squares' based on the recommendations of a 2007 study by Gehl Architects. The central square proposed by Gehl includes Sydney Square and Town Hall Square. In 2017, Gehl Architects completed an urban design analysis of the Town Hall precinct, including both Sydney Square and Town Hall Square.
3. The Public Space Public Life Study 2020, by Gehl Architects, in collaboration with the City, is a review of the previous study. Council noted the updated study, which reaffirmed the need for the Three Squares following the completion of the light rail and the ongoing pedestrianisation of George Street and post Covid-19, to encourage the community back to the city centre. The study notes the character relationship between Sydney Square and a future Town Hall Square
 - (a) Sydney Square is suited as a quiet respite away from the hustle and bustle of the City
 - (b) Town Hall Square to be a major civic square, a lively, open, central square for both everyday life and larger events.
4. In 2021, Council adopted the Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan which includes the area of Sydney Square. The plan is part of a broader City Centre Public Domain planning process developing plans for eight specific precincts each with identified project opportunities being implemented across the city.
5. In 2022, Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision expanded on the Three Linked City Squares concept and included this project as one of the 10 project ideas.
6. The Town Hall precinct has undergone significant change with public and private investment driving growth including the 2019 light rail stop at Town Hall and 2024 Gadigal Metro station which has intensified the interchange role of streets and brings additional people to the precinct daily.
7. In May 2023 Council:
 - (a) endorsed the continued the transformation of Central Sydney and the staged development and delivery of Sydney Square within the Town Hall Public Domain Precinct, with Sydney Square and the surrounding public areas including Druiitt Street and Bathurst Streets as the next phase in the overall transformation program;
 - (b) resolved to develop a concept design for the upgrade and redevelopment of Sydney Square working with St Andrew's House Corporation, St Andrew's Cathedral School, the Anglican Church Property Trust Diocese of Sydney (St Andrew's Cathedral) and the community;

- (c) noted that the Chief Executive Officer would negotiate a comprehensive management agreement to support the ongoing operation of a revitalised Sydney Square with St Andrews House Corporation and Anglican Church Property Trust Diocese of Sydney which will be the subject of a future report to Council;
 - (d) delegated authority to the Chief Executive Officer to vary the lease for Town Hall Arcade with St Andrew's House Corporation to support alignment of the redevelopment of Sydney Square.
8. In February 2025 Council resolved that the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate options to accelerate the delivery of Town Hall Square for Council's consideration as part of the 2025/26 budget that will include a full project scope and costings, and for demolition to start this term. As a result of this resolution, the prioritisation of Town Hall Square has changed and as a consequence it has been necessary to review the proposed Sydney Square project and works are now proposed to be delivered in 2 stages.

The Site

9. Sydney Square, first conceived in the early 1960s, is the civic space at the centre of a 19,658 square metre City block bound by George and Drutt Street Streets to the east and north, and Kent and Bathurst Streets to the west and south.
10. Sydney Square is defined in the Sydney LEP 2012, refer Attachment A. The area of the square is protected by clause 6.18 to:
- (a) prevent additional overshadowing of valued public spaces that are used as areas for passive recreation by the public, workers and visitors in Central Sydney and
 - (b) protect significant, new and planned public places from overshadowing.
11. The City and Sydney Anglican Properties (SAP) (previously St Andrew's House Corporation and the Anglican Church Property Trust Diocese of Sydney) each own land upon which Sydney Square is built. The City owns the northern side of Sydney Square and Town Hall Arcade alongside Sydney Town Hall. The remaining area of the square and arcade is owned by SAP. Refer Attachment B.
12. The Square provides shade and protected pedestrian respite, set back from the busy foot traffic of George Street and surrounded by the sandstone architecture. The square is activated by the City's "Living Colour" and "Chairs in Squares" programs as well as public use by commuters, parishioners, workers and school children throughout the day, particularly at lunchtime.
13. As the largest open space connected to Town Hall the Square hosts protests and civic gatherings. St Andrews Cathedral hosts occasional special services, including state funerals that use Sydney Square for gatherings
14. The aging pebblecrete surface is inconsistent with the high-quality granite paving on the surrounding footpaths and George Street, slips and trips have formed due to age of the surface and cannot be easily patched or replaced due to the unique material. Lighting and street furniture are nearing end of life and require replacement. Garden beds have become compacted and drab.

Project Scope

15. The objectives for the renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square are to create:
 - (a) A civic space, connected to George Street and the Future Town Hall Square
 - (b) A space for people to sit and relax and linger in the City - an outdoor living room in the city
 - (c) A space for events connected to Town Hall, St Andrews Cathedral, School, or Town Hall Square events.
16. The renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square will be staged to complete prioritised works in Stage 1 ahead of the commencement of the delivery of the Town Hall Square project in 2028. The extent of Stage 1 works is outlined in Attachment B.
17. The scope of renewal and upgrade works within the Stage 1 area include:
 - (a) Renewal of ground surfaces, paving, stairs, with associated drainage, waterproofing and any necessary structural repairs to Town Hall Arcade below
 - (b) New public domain lighting, furniture and wayfinding signage to main square, western and eastern side of the cathedral
 - (c) Existing trees retained with new garden beds
 - (d) Investigate suitable options for the public sculpture "to Sail to Stop"
 - (e) Investigate removal of the flag poles and escalator from Kent Street to Lower Square.
18. Works excluded from the project scope are:
 - (a) Any alterations to the Structure or egress of Town Hall Arcade and fire stairs, including structural remediation on SAP land from inside the arcade
 - (b) Relocation or reconfiguration of surface drainage
 - (c) Any decorative / feature lighting to Sydney Town Hall or Cathedral
 - (d) New public art
 - (e) The St Andrews Cathedral community garden to the west of the Bathurst Street (Cathedral) driveway which is to be delivered by SAP under the principals of agreement
 - (f) Any works to the boundary conditions south of the Cathedral, including existing cathedral boundary wall, sandstone gate posts, train station vent stacks
 - (g) New vehicle control (operable bollards) in the driveway from Bathurst Street.
19. The scope for Stage 2 will be reviewed and reported to Council prior to delivery.

Agreements with Sydney Anglican Property

20. In May 2023 Council resolved that the Chief Executive Officer would negotiate a comprehensive management agreement to support the ongoing operation of a

revitalised Sydney Square with St Andrew's House Corporation and Anglican Church Property Trust Diocese of Sydney which will be the subject of a future report to Council.

21. City staff commenced consultation in August 2023. In 2024, Sydney Anglican Property (SAP) was formed and now represents the interests of the registered proprietors of the Anglican Diocese. SAP has indicated general support for the project scope and the draft agreement principles which, if endorsed, will form the basis of agreements with SAP and the registered proprietors. The proposed principles for these agreements are included in Confidential Attachment C - Draft Principles for Agreement.
22. The public use of land owned by the registered proprietors of the Anglican Diocese for civic square functions since the construction of Sydney Square.
23. An operational agreement for the control and management of Sydney Square was last updated on 22 August 1983. A new management agreement is now required to reflect the intentions for use shared by the landowners in light of the renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

24. 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 3 - Public places for all - Sydney Square sits between two important civic landmarks, Sydney Town Hall and St Andrew's Cathedral. Sydney Square's generally poor presentation does not reflect the importance of these buildings and their role in our community. Post light rail, this area is not delivering on the amenity needed by our community - improvements to Sydney Square will encourage better use of the square and increase amenity for the community and will benefit our two important heritage buildings.
 - (b) Direction 4 - Design excellence and sustainable development - A refurbishment of the square will lift its design quality to match that of George Street, Sydney Town Hall and St Andrew's Cathedral.
 - (c) Direction 5 - A city for walking, cycling and public transport - Sydney Square and Town Hall Arcade provide access to Town Hall Station and the light rail. Improving legibility and access will benefit both the square and the stations.
 - (d) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - Sydney Square has the potential to host events, markets and other cultural activities, as well as to be a place of respite in a busy city environment. An adaptable square design will create opportunities for increased usage, in particular activation of its edges.

Organisational Impact

25. Proposed new agreements with SAP will have organisational impact, clarifying that the City has use and control of the main gathering area of Sydney Square for public square uses and events.

26. Event management will be simplified within a renewed Civic Square under defined control.

Risks

- (a) Initial project risk assessments have been undertaken during the development of the project scope. Key risks identified and mitigation strategies are: Unable to reach key agreements with Sydney Anglican Property - Currently being mitigated through early consultation and regular meetings.
 - (b) Long lead-time items e.g. paving / furniture - The project shall use more readily available / standard materials for paving, lighting, and the like, and limit custom furniture.
 - (c) Construction impacts on surrounding buildings (school exam periods, church services, general access, etc) - This will be mitigated through staging and sequencing of works, general timing of works, and nominating 'quiet' periods.
 - (d) Latent conditions identified once construction has commenced - Intrusive site investigations to be completed prior to commencement of works.
27. Project and design safety risk assessments will be continuously reviewed and updated through the life of the project in consideration of the principles in the City's risk appetite, which states that:
- (a) We are open to taking risks that align with our strategic objectives and are within our capacity to manage effectively.
 - (b) We encourage a culture of responsible risk taking to support innovation, excellence and continuous improvement.
 - (c) We identify and evaluate emerging risks to ensure timely and appropriate responses.

Social / Cultural / Community

28. The renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square creates increased opportunities for community enjoyment and enables cultural experiences in a city where public space is in great demand.

Environmental

29. The development of the precinct is aligned with the City's leadership in environmental sustainability and climate action through retaining tree canopy to maximise green linkage improvements between city, parklands, and harbour.

Financial Implications

30. Financial Implications are detailed in Confidential Attachment D
31. The draft Long Term Financial Plan being considered by Council in May 2025, includes an allocation of \$35 million for the redevelopment of Sydney Square.
32. The current and draft 10-year Long Term Financial Plan includes revenue from the Town Hall Arcade stratum of lease.

Relevant Legislation

33. Project delivery will be in accordance with relevant planning and approval legislation and regulations, including the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW) and Roads Act 1993 (NSW).
34. Leases are administered and managed under the Conveyancing Act 1919 (NSW) and Retail Leases Act 1994 (NSW).
35. Local Government Act 1993 (NSW).
36. 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.
37. Attachment C and D contains confidential commercial information which, if disclosed, would confer a commercial advantage on a person with whom Council is conducting (or proposes to conduct) business.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

38. Current program dates
 - (a) Scope / Design Development complete late 2025
 - (b) Lodge Development Application early-mid 2026
 - (c) Documentation complete mid-end 2026
 - (d) Construction start end 2026
 - (e) Construction completion end 2027

Options

39. The recommended option is for a staged delivery of the public domain renewal works.
- (a) The extent of Stage 1 is outlined in Attachment B and includes the main square, lower square, eastern and western square.
 - (b) Provision has been made in the draft Long term Financial plan for a future Stage 2 which will consider the above potential additional scope opportunities.
40. The following options were reviewed during the development of the project scope:
- (a) Holistic renewal and upgrade of Sydney Square - an option to complete all renewal and upgrade works in a single stage of works was reviewed. This option is not recommended as construction works would be on-going at commencement of the delivery of the Town Hall Square project.
 - (b) Expanded scope of works - options to expand the scope of works to include structural changes to arcade entry / exit points and levels within the square and adjoining buildings were reviewed. Expanding the scope of works is not recommended due to scope and cost increases.

Public Consultation

41. Extensive community consultation and engagement was undertaken as part of Sustainable Sydney 2030 and Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision, and for the Town Hall Precinct Public Domain Plan.
42. Public consultation will be undertaken as part the planning approval process for the project.

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