

MyPlace Green Square Community Survey 2017

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Green Square is the largest urban redevelopment project in the southern hemisphere (COS 2017a:84). It is also one of the fastest growing areas in Sydney with the current population expected to double by 2030 (COS 2017a:108). The City of Sydney's Community Strategic Plan (COS 2017a) recognises that urban renewal sites such as Green Square provide the opportunity to make significant improvements to the social, economic and environmental performance of the City and Sydney region.

The City of Sydney has a high level vision for Green Square: it will be a vibrant sustainable village in which to live and work, incorporating retail, food, entertainment, and a public domain that supports cultural and community activities including public art. In order to achieve this goal, local communities need to have the facilities, resources, capacity, confidence and resilience to adapt to changing circumstances (COS 2014a: Objective 6.2).

The City of Sydney's vision for a socially sustainable city is a socially just and resilient city – a city for all. One of the major pillars of this vision is that “it is a city where people are socially connected and have a shared commitment to the wellbeing of their community” (COS 2016a:2). So that the City of Sydney can identify how it might best support communities' social wellbeing associated with environmental, economic and social changes, it is essential to collect information about the experiences and desires of residents and workers. This includes their satisfaction with, and feelings of attachment and belonging to, the places they live and work, the nature of their social interactions and social cohesion, and their plans and desires regarding their local areas. To this end, this report presents the results of a community survey of residents and workers in the Green Square Urban Renewal Area in Sydney, Australia. The City intends for the survey to be undertaken on a recurring basis over coming years, to monitor changes to the social fabric over time as the urban renewal area develops.

Research aims

The study was undertaken by researchers at UNSW Sydney, with the assistance and support of the City of Sydney Council.

The aim of this research was to develop a survey tool for on-going assessment of social interactions and social cohesion at a large-scale urban renewal site that could be used to:

- » Measure the nature of social cohesion and social interaction and identify opportunities and barriers residents face in contributing to social cohesion and community development.
- » Understand the wellbeing of residents and workers, including their satisfaction with and attachment to the area, their local area preferences and desires, and their plans for the future.

Background

Urban renewal in brownfield areas is an important component of broader compact city policies in place in Sydney, around Australia, and elsewhere in the world. Local and state governments have an interest in understanding how well urban renewal areas are performing, including the satisfaction of residents and workers with these areas.

Understanding the satisfaction of residents and workers with these areas includes understanding resident and worker wellbeing, desires, patterns of facility and service use, social interaction and social cohesion. Social interaction is related to levels of neighbouring and refers to the nature and quality of interactions

between people. Social cohesion is related to psychological sense of community and includes affective components of neighbourhood social life, including shared emotional connections, place attachment, membership, influence and sense of place.

Most neighbourhood studies on urban renewal areas have focused on the renewal of areas identified as disadvantaged, often in suburban areas, and less attention has been paid to urban renewal in brownfield sites, or to areas dominated by private medium and high density housing. There are few systematic post-occupancy studies of social outcomes of these areas, which make up a large component of urban growth in central and inner areas of cities. This is a significant gap in knowledge around planning for these very important growth areas.

Information collected in a tailored survey of social interaction and social cohesion in higher-density urban renewal sites, such as the survey presented in this report, can inform local land use planning, community development interventions, infrastructure investment and open space and public domain planning.

Survey development

The Green Square Community Survey was designed as an on-going assessment tool for large-scale brownfield urban renewal sites dominated by private medium and high-density housing.

The survey focuses on the attitudes and behaviours of residents and workers. Information collected can be used to assess existing usage of services and facilities and to plan for new services and facilities provided by local council in regards to their influence on social interaction and social cohesion. The survey is also designed to provide information on the influence of other factors (beyond the provision of services and facilities by the City of Sydney) on social interaction and social cohesion, which can inform changes and improvements in other areas such as adapting design requirements, responding to social issues or concerns, and encouraging grass-roots initiatives.

The survey tool was developed from a comprehensive research process, which included a pilot survey. A full survey was run in 2014, and another in 2017. The survey was amended between 2014 and 2017 in response to consultations undertaken with a wide range of City of Sydney staff, with the main change being a reduction in the number of questions asked. Comparisons between the surveys are still possible where the questions remain the same in 2017 as in 2014. In 2017 the boundaries of the survey were expanded to incorporate surrounding areas, including the Ashmore Precinct and adjacent neighbourhoods – another significant urban renewal area. To enable comparisons between the 2014 and 2017 results, this report presents the findings of the 2017 survey for only those respondents who lived or worked in the Green Square Urban renewal Area.

In total, 1089 people completed the survey in Green Square, including 989 residents and 216 workers (116 people both lived and worked in Green Square). This represents a 343% increase in response rate for residents compared to the 2014 Green Square Community Survey. The body of this report presents the findings for residents. With a weighting for age applied, the results for residents of Green Square can be understood as broadly representative of the total resident population of Green Square (26,657 people, ABS 2016), with a margin of error of about 3%.

Key findings

Findings of the 2017 survey are broadly similar to those of the 2014 survey. The results of the 2017 survey demonstrate the following:

Wellbeing of residents

- » The majority of residents (87%) agreed that the area was a good place to live, but fewer agreed that it was a good place to raise children (38%) or retire (28%).
- » The most commonly mentioned reasons for moving to the area were proximity to the Sydney CBD (73%) and proximity to public transport (48%), followed closely by lifestyle (44%).
- » Most (70%) of the residents who completed the survey had lived in Green Square for less than six years and the majority (68%) planned to remain living in the area for a number of years.
- » The things people most commonly said they liked about living in Green Square were the proximity of the location to the CBD, convenience of the location, access to public transport, and public space, especially green space. People also liked the café and restaurant culture of the area.
- » The things people most commonly said they disliked about living in Green Square related to transport, especially heavy traffic and concerns about parking. People also raised concerns about the impact of construction, density of development and noise in the area. Many people were also concerned about the limited number and/or variety of services and facilities in the area including shops, evening activities and convenient public transport.
- » Related to the above two points, the most commonly mentioned group of improvements residents wanted in Green Square related to transport management, especially improved traffic management (49%) and better public transport that connects to more areas of the city (50%), improved parking (28%) and safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists (20%). The second most commonly desired improvements were economic, especially a wider variety of cafés, restaurants and bars (58%) and cultural improvements, such as more evening activities (e.g. night markets or open air cinemas) (45%).
- » People were less likely to feel a part of the community in their local area (33% 'strongly' or 'very strongly') than at larger geographical scales (60% 'strongly' or 'very strongly' for Sydney and Australia, 41% for inner city and surrounds), and least likely at the scale of their street (24%). They were somewhat more likely to feel a part of the community in their building (37%). This compares to 74% of respondents across the City of Sydney being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with feeling part of their community overall (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015)
- » Only one-third (31%) of residents were satisfied with the level of social interaction they have with other people who live and work in Green Square, with the remaining 69% wanting more interaction, including 31% who currently had no interaction with other people in the area.

The nature of social interaction and social cohesion in the area

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- » While most people (90%) said they would help their neighbours, fewer (48%) thought their neighbours would help them. This compares to wider City of Sydney figures where 96% of people would be willing to help their neighbours 'definitely' or 'sometimes', and 62% felt they could get help 'definitely' or 'sometimes' (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015). A fifth of Green Square residents (21%) borrowed things and exchanged favours with neighbours and 31% regularly stopped to talk with people in their neighbourhood.

- » Most (81%) resident survey respondents meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least weekly.
- » The most common ways in which people had contact with other people while in Green Square were socialising in cafés, restaurants and/or pubs (53%) and socialising in their own or others' homes (47%). Socialising on the street, shopping and in parks were also important.
- » Incidental interaction (running into people you know) was most likely to occur in local shops (59%), at a café, restaurant or pub (52%), the entrance or near the building that people lived in (50%) or on local streets (50%).
- » Many residents said that most of their friends were of a similar age (77%) and educational background (70%) and just over half (52%) said that they were of a similar ethnic background. The figures for age and education are similar to national figures collected in the Australian General Social Survey (2010) (when this question was last asked), but much fewer respondents said that their friends were of a similar ethnic background than the national average, suggesting that friendship groups amongst Green Square residents are more ethnically mixed than for the Australian population as a whole.
- » Most Green Square residents had not been involved in formal civic activities such as volunteering, or participating in clubs and associations *over the past month*. Figures for wider City of Sydney are 50% and 89% respectively, though *over the past year* (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015). However, over the past year 31% had previously taken part in another research project, 34% had signed a petition and 12% had participated in running a strata or community title scheme.
- » Around a third of the residents thought that they understood their rights around urban development and planning for the local area (27%). However, a much smaller percentage felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area (17%) or contributing to shaping Green Square (14%). Related to this, only 20% felt that their thoughts about local issues in Green Square could be heard by people who make a difference and only 15% agreed that there was strong local leadership in the area.
- » Of the reliable responses (n=495) to the question on safety¹, the majority of residents felt safe or unconcerned in all situations, with residents feeling safest at home alone during the day (in which circumstance 99% of people felt safe or unconcerned), and least safe when walking in Green Square alone after dark (27% unsafe or not at all safe). This compares to 98% feeling (very) safe or neutral at home during the day, and 23% feeling (very) unsafe walking in the local area after dark in the wider City of Sydney area (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015).

Opportunities and barriers residents face in contributing to social cohesion and community development

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- » The services and facilities in the Green Square area most commonly used by residents were local cafés and restaurants (93%), local parks (79%) and regional parks (63%). The use of formal community facilities was much lower, with community or neighbourhood centres being the highest at 13%.
- » The most common limitation people experience to socialising with others in the area is time constraints (51% often or all of the time). Other important limitations are difficulty in finding information about social

¹ Unfortunately, this question was asked in such a way in the online survey that the results cannot be relied upon. Subsequently results are presented here only from completed hardcopies of the survey.

activities (29% often or all of the time), not being sure what to talk to new people about social activities (18% often or all of the time) and not being interested (21% often or all of the time).

- » People would like to get information about opportunities to participate in social activities in Green Square from social media (65%), emailed community newsletters (52%), noticeboards (53%), from websites (37%), and printed community newsletters (33%).

Implications for practice

The results of the survey were presented to staff across the City of Sydney Council. It is expected that the survey findings will be used to inform Council's investments and activities across a range of areas, including community development, civic engagement, communications, placemaking, land use planning, open space and public domain planning, and local business development. The implications for practice presented here are preliminary and it is expected that City staff will further analyse and apply the survey findings to inform their work going forward.

Implications for community development

Green Square is an area with a large proportion of new residents and the majority of residents want more interaction with others in the local area. Interventions to encourage social interaction will be needed that engage residents, many of whom who demonstrated a desire for greater involvement in social interactions, but are constrained because of a lack of time and/or knowledge about the opportunities available to them.

Implications for civic engagement

A minority of residents understand their rights around planning and urban development in the local area and an even smaller percentage felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area. A minority felt that their thoughts about local issues could be heard by people who make a difference and that there was strong local leadership in the area. There is potential for improved engagement amongst residents in the area as demonstrated by their willingness to be engaged in political discussions, with higher proportions of residents having participated in other research, signed petitions or participated in online discussions.

Implications for communications

Aside from time constraints, difficulty in finding information about social activities was the second most common limitation given by residents to socialising with others in the area. Residents would most like to receive this type of information through social media, noticeboards and e-mails. There may be potential for the City to provide such information not only through City-specific social media, but also through partnering with other social media platforms known to be actively used in the area.

Implications for placemaking

People felt more strongly connected to Australia, Sydney and the inner city and surrounds than to their local area, street or building. Respondents to the 2017 survey were less connected to the communities at different scales in 2017 than in 2014. This may in part reflect the high proportion of residents who have lived in the area for less than six years, but nevertheless suggests that there is potential for further community development at the local scale in the Green Square area.

Implications for land use planning

The things people most commonly said they disliked about the area included heavy traffic and concerns about parking and the most commonly mentioned improvements residents wanted related to traffic management, better public transport that connects to more parts of the city, improved parking and safer

conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Many people were also concerned about the danger of overdevelopment in the area. Pressure on roads and transport is area of discontent amongst many residents, and indicates an important ongoing role for the City in continuing to liaise with relevant state transport and roads authorities to try to manage these issues, alongside the City's own land use planning controls.

Implications for open space and public domain planning

Parks and public spaces are significant locations for social interaction in Green Square and heavily used by residents. This could influence local land use planning and infrastructure development in Green Square and in future urban renewal areas, as it suggests that parks are more important than formal community spaces in facilitating local social interaction.

Implications for local business

The most common places where people socialise with others in Green Square is cafes, restaurants and/or pubs and incidental interaction is also most likely to occur in these places and at local shops. Cafes and restaurants are also the most commonly used services and facilities, followed by local parks. Such businesses are therefore playing an important social role in the area, and more than half of residents said that they would like to see a wider variety of cafes, restaurants and bars in the area in the future. This suggests that the ideal of mixed-use development encouraging greater social interaction is supported by the findings in this case and has implications for development application planners who are making decisions about new businesses in the area.