



MyPlace Green Square Community Survey 2023

Executive Summary

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July 2023



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This report is based on research undertaken with funding from the City of Sydney Council. The report has been peer reviewed and approved by staff at the City of Sydney Council. We would like to acknowledge and thank Yunzheng Zhang and Parian Hoseini for their assistance with this project. We would also like to acknowledge Caitlin Buckle and Sian Thompson for their contribution to the project in previous years.

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Executive Summary

The Green Square urban renewal area stretches across 278 hectares in the City of Sydney Local Government Area, between the Central Business District and Sydney Airport (CoS 2015). It is one of the fastest growing areas in Sydney with 33,000 new residential dwellings built and 63,000 people expected to live in the area when complete (CoS 2023).

The City of Sydney has a vision for Green Square: it will be a vibrant, sustainable and connected community in which to live and work (CoS 2019). In order to support resilient and inclusive local communities, the City is working to ensure that residents and workers in Green Square have the facilities, resources, capacity and confidence to adapt to changing circumstances (CoS 2017). The City of Sydney created a new town centre in the area and have supported \$22b of private development with \$1.8b of public infrastructure in the area (CoS 2023).

The City of Sydney's vision for a socially sustainable city is a socially just and resilient city – a city for all (CoS 2019). The City's social sustainability policy includes ten guiding principles, six of which this survey contributes to (CoS 2019 pp. 19-20):

- “Sydney's communities' strengths are valued and supported.”
- “Sydney is a welcoming, socially connected city that embraces diversity.”
- “Sydney is a safe and accessible city for people of all ages and abilities.”
- “Sydney's environment supports health and wellbeing.”
- “Sydney is a democratic city where people can participate and influence local decisions.”
- “Sydney is a collaborative city where responsibility for community wellbeing is shared.”

So that the City can identify how it might best support communities' social wellbeing and resilience 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. This survey is undertaken on a recurring basis every 2-3 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.

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 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 regarding 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 community programs and events, 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. Full surveys were run in 2014, 2017, 2020 and 2023. 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. In 2017 the boundaries of the survey were also expanded to incorporate surrounding areas – including the Ashmore Precinct and adjacent neighbourhoods, another significant urban renewal area. Results from this precinct are presented in a separate report, which can be access here – <https://cityfutures.adg.unsw.edu.au/my-place-local-community-survey-2023/>. The survey has retained the same questions since 2017, except for a change to the wording of the gender question in the 2023 survey.

In total, 2,288 people completed the survey in Green Square in 2023, including 1,960 residents and 841 workers (513 people both lived and worked in Green Square). 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 (with the exception of language spoken at home) with a margin of error of less than 3%. After weighting for age, the survey significantly underrepresents people speaking a language other than English at home (14% of survey respondents compared to 49% of residents at the last Census) and somewhat underrepresents men, private renters, single person households and residents in 4+ storey apartments.

Key findings

The results of the 2023 survey demonstrate the following:

Wellbeing of residents

- The majority of residents (79%) agreed that the area was a good place to live. This figure is notably lower than in the 2020 survey (90% agreed it was a good place to live) and the 2017 survey (87% agreed).
- Fewer residents agreed that it was a good place to raise children (48%) or retire (39%). However, 70% of households with children agreed the area is a good place to raise children and more than half of people aged over 50 (56%) think the area is a good place to retire.
- The most commonly selected reasons for moving to the area were proximity to the Sydney CBD (58%) and proximity to public transport (44%). These were also the most commonly mentioned reasons in 2020 and 2017.
- The things people most commonly said that they liked about living in Green Square were the proximity to the Sydney CBD (63%), convenience of the location (59%), access to public transport (53%), and parks and green spaces (48%). People also liked that there are good facilities and services like shops, schools and libraries in the area (42%).
- The things people most commonly said that they disliked about living in Green Square related to the impacts of construction on the area (42%) and its overall density (35%). Many people were also concerned about insufficient parking (33%) and traffic (31%). In addition, almost a quarter (24%) of families with children were concerned that there are not enough schools in the area.
- Just over one-third (36%) of people felt strongly or very strongly part of their community at the local neighbourhood level. This was higher than in 2020, when only 26% of people reported feeling connected to their local neighbourhood. People were more likely to feel strongly or very strongly connected to their suburb (39%), the inner city (44%), Sydney (55%) and Australia (54%). The lowest level of attachment was to the street on which they lived (32% felt strongly or very strongly attached), but this had increased since 2020 (when only 23% of people reported feeling attached to their street). A similar proportion of people felt strongly or very attached to the building where they live in 2023 (42%) as in 2020 (41%). These results are lower than for the City of Sydney area as a whole (44% of City residents were satisfied with feeling part of their community in their local area in the 2018 City of Sydney Wellbeing Survey), and reflect the lower score found in the Green Square sub-sample of the 2018 City Wellbeing Survey (39% satisfied), which has decreased over time.

- The majority (73%) of the residents who completed the survey had lived in Green Square for 5 years or less and the majority (70%) planned to remain residents in the area for a number of years.
- Only one-quarter (26%) 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 74% all wanting more interaction, including 35% who currently had no interaction with other people in the area. Satisfaction has declined since the 2020 survey, when 32% of residents were satisfied with their level of interaction with other people in Green Square. In 2023, the vast majority (80%) of new residents who have lived in the area for less than one year would like to have more involvement with others in the area.
- The most commonly mentioned improvements residents wanted in Green Square related to socialising opportunities, including the variety of cafés, restaurants and bars (60%) and the availability of evening activities (45%), especially amongst younger people. While remaining important, improvements to traffic management and better public transport connectivity were less important in 2023 than in 2020 or 2017.
- Most Green Square residents travel to work or study using public transport (55%), and most walk (74%) and/or drive (36%) to the supermarket or shops. Many people also walk (57%) and/or drive (36%) to other social, sport or recreational activities.

The nature of social interaction and social cohesion in the area

- While most people (85%) said they would help their neighbours if needed, fewer (53%) thought their neighbours would help them, repeating the findings from the 2017 and 2020 surveys. These figures are similar to the figures for the city as a whole (95% of people said they would help their neighbours and 50% said they could get help from their neighbours when needed in the 2018 City of Sydney Wellbeing Survey). A third of resident respondents (33%) borrowed things and exchanged favours with neighbours and 43% regularly stopped to talk with people in their neighbourhood, an increase from the 2020 survey (where the results were 22% and 30% respectively).
- Most (78%) resident survey respondents meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least weekly. A small proportion (7%) meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues less than once per month.
- The most common ways in which people have contact with other people while in Green Square were chatting on the street (46%) and socialising in cafés, restaurants and/or pubs (43%). Socialising in parks is becoming increasingly important (28% in 2017, 32% in 2020 and 34% in 2023).
- Incidental interaction (running into people you know) was most likely to occur at local streets (56%), a local café, restaurant or pub (56%), and local shops (56%). Other important locations for incidental interaction were the entrance to the building people live in (54%) and local parks (53%).
- Many residents said most of their friends were of a similar age (68%) and educational background (63%) and just less than half (45%) said that they were of a similar ethnic background.

- Participation in formal civic activities increased across almost all measures between the 2020 and 2023 surveys. While slightly fewer people had signed a petition in 2023 than 2020, across all other measures, participation in civic activity increased. Especially notable was that 45% of people had taken part in another research project in the past year (compared to 24% in 2020 and 31% in 2017), 33% had participated in an online discussion (17% in 2020 and 20% in 2017) and 24% had attended a community meeting or consultation event (12% in 2020 and 2017).
- One-third of residents thought that they understand the rights around urban development and planning for the local area (35%). A quarter felt that they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area (26%) or contributing to shaping Green Square (24%). Almost one-third (29%) felt that their thoughts about local issues in Green Square could be heard by people who make a difference (an increase from 22% in 2020) and almost a third (29%) agreed that there was strong local leadership in the area (an increase from 18% in 2020).
- The majority of residents felt safe or unconcerned in all situations. The situation in which the highest proportion of people felt unsafe was walking in Green Square alone after dark, in which 16% of people felt unsafe or very unsafe. Women were more likely to feel unsafe walking alone after dark (19%) than men (12%).
- While the majority (58%) of people feel that most people can be trusted, a notable minority (12%) disagree. These findings show an improvement over time, with 51% and 50% of people agreeing with this statement in 2020 and 2017 respectively.

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

- The services and facilities in Green Square most commonly used by residents were local cafés and restaurants (86%), local parks (76%) and regional parks (63%), similar to the results of the 2017 and 2020 surveys. Compared to the results from the 2017 and 2020 surveys, many more people attended a community event or market (51%), community gardens (31%), community or neighbourhood centre (24%) and childcare centres (23%).
- The most common limitation people experience to socialising with others in the area is time constraints (43% often or all of the time). Other important limitations are difficulty in finding information about social activities (33% often or all of the time), not being interested (23% often or all of the time), and not being confident with strangers (22% often or all of the time).
- People would like to get information about opportunities to participate in social activities in their local area electronically such as via social media (73%) and e-mails (47%). Almost half (46%) would like to be notified via notice boards in public places and/or in their building. Preferences differ by age and language spoken at home, although social media is the preferred medium across all age and language groups.

Implications for practice

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, 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. 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.

Implications for community development

Green Square is an area with a large proportion of new residents (73% of survey respondents have lived in the area for 5 years or less) and high residential mobility (only 6% disagreed with the statement that people move in and out of the area quite often). However, the majority (70%) of people plan to remain resident in the area for a number of years and there is a more established resident base already in the area (26% of people who completed the survey had lived in the area for 6 years or more). Connection to community at the local level has increased in the 2023 survey compared to the 2020 and 2017 surveys at the scale of the inner city and surrounds (44% connected), suburb (40%), local neighbourhood area (36%), the street (32%) and the building (42%).

There is a desire to build more local connections, with almost three-quarters (74%) of residents wanting to have more interaction with others who live and work in the area. Younger people in particular desire more local social interactions, with 78% of 18-29 year olds wanting more social interaction, and 44% saying that they do not have any interaction with people in the local area but would like to. This suggests that programs targeting younger residents in Green Square might be attractive. Interventions to encourage social interaction will be needed that engage residents 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, and a lack of confidence when dealing with strangers. Notably, desire for more local social interaction was also high in the neighbouring Ashmore area, where 66% of residents wanted more local social interactions. Council may, therefore, consider interventions to encourage social interaction across the broader area.

Implications for civic engagement

Around a third (35%) of residents felt they understood their rights around planning and urban development in the local area, slightly higher than in 2020 (32%) and 2017 (27%). Around a quarter (26%) felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area (higher than 2020 when the figure was only 17%). It is possible that this figure is partly explained by the activities of the Community Construction Liaison Group that provided a forum for dialogue between City project staff, the local community and local stakeholders involved in construction projects within and around the Green Square town centre. The group meetings were well attended by local residents during 2021 and early 2022. More than a quarter (29%) felt that their thoughts about local issues could be heard by people who make a difference (higher than in 2020 when the figure was 22%) and that there was strong local leadership in the area (also 29%, compared to only 18% in 2020).

There is potential for improved engagement amongst residents in the area as demonstrated by their willingness to be engaged in political discussions, with more residents having participated in other

research (45%) and participated in an online discussion (33%). The survey also revealed that relationships between language spoken at home and civic engagement are complex. People who speak a language other than English at home were less likely to attend a community meeting or consultation event, participate in council planning processes, contact a local politician or contact a media outlet than people who speak English at home in 2023. However, in 2020, participation in council planning processes were equal or higher amongst people who speak a language other than English at home. In 2023, people who speak a language other than English at home were more likely to have participated in another research study than people who speak English at home (and were also equally or more likely to do so in 2020).

There were also differences between people who speak a Chinese language and other language at home, with participation in online discussions being higher amongst Chinese speaking residents than those speaking another language other than English at home. In comparison, participation in a protest or demonstration and signing a petition was higher for those speaking English and another language at home compared to Chinese-speaking residents. These observed differences are based on small sample sizes and should, therefore, be treated with caution. However, they suggest that different strategies may be needed to encourage civic engagement of people who speak a language other than English at home and that different strategies may be more effective for different language groups.

Implications for communications

Aside from time constraints (43%), difficulty in finding information about social activities (33%) was the second most common limitation given by residents to socialising with others in the area. Difficulties finding information about social activities were more pronounced among people speaking languages other than English at home.

Residents would like to receive information about social activities through social media (73%), e-mails (43%), noticeboards in public places and their buildings (46%) and websites (37%). The City can provide such information through City-specific social media and through partnering with other social media platforms known to be actively used in the area, as well as collaborating with building managers. Social media was effective in promoting the survey to residents. Social media was the preferred means for receiving information about social activities across all age groups. There has been a significant change between the 2020 and 2023 surveys in this regard: in 2020, only 36% of people aged over 50 wished to receive information via social media while in 2023 the figure was 65% for those over 50. This may reflect a change in recruitment strategy for the 2023 survey with more promotion occurring via social media (11.4% of survey respondents accessed the survey through social media channels). There were some differences in preferences between ages across other media, with e-mails and websites more popular amongst residents aged over 50, and noticeboards more popular amongst residents under 50. People who speak a language other than English at home were more likely than English speakers to wish to receive information via noticeboards. These results indicate that social media is an effective communication tool, but that a variety of communication methods, including noticeboards, e-mails and websites will be needed to reach all groups.

Implications for placemaking

The majority of residents (79%) agreed that the area is a good place to live, indicating a reduction in satisfaction since 2020 (90% agreed) and 2017 (87% agreed). People aged 30-49 were more likely to agree that the area is a good place to live (82%) than older (76% for those aged 50+) and younger (75% for those aged 18-29) residents. The City may wish to explore the reasons for this further with

members of the community. People felt more strongly connected to Australia, Sydney and the inner city and surrounds than to their local area, street or building, which was also the case during the 2020 survey. However, in 2023, the proportion of people feeling connected to their community at the local neighbourhood level was 36% (compared to only 26% during the 2020 survey). Connection to the street on which they live also increased between the 2020 survey (23%) and the 2023 survey (32%). This indicates increasing levels of attachment at the local scale, at the same time as a decline in satisfaction overall. These increasing levels of attachment cannot be explained by the length of residence of survey respondents (28% of respondents in 2020 had lived in the area for more than 6 years compared to 26% in 2023).

Implications for land use planning and transport planning and programs

The things people most commonly said they disliked about the area related to the impacts of construction on the area (42%) and its overall density (35%). Many people were also concerned about insufficient parking (33%) and heavy traffic (31%). While improvements to traffic management and public transport were important in 2017 (mentioned by 49% and 50% of resident respectively), in 2020 they remained important but were less commonly mentioned (mentioned by 43% and 43% of residents respectively), and in 2023 they were mentioned by an even smaller proportion of respondents as an area for improvement (29% and 35%). In 2023, people were more likely to ask for a greater variety of cafés, restaurants and bars (60%) and more evening activities (45%). This likely reflects the gradual maturity of Green Square as a neighbourhood, where most hard infrastructure is now in place.

More than half (55%) of residents travel to work or study using public transport and almost half (44%) said they moved to the area because of the proximity to public transport, demonstrating the important role that public transport plays in the attractiveness of the area. However, use of a private car to travel to work/study increased to 32% (from 28% in 2020). Cycling to work also increased from 9% per cent in 2020 to 15% in 2023. These changes in mode of transport likely reflect a broader shift away from public transport use since the Covid-19 pandemic. The increase in cycling may also be related to substantial investment in new cycleways in the area since 2020 as well as investment in local courses, guided rides, try-a-bike events and e-bike lease trials.

Implications for open space, public domain and community facility planning

Parks and public spaces are significant locations for social interaction in Green Square and heavily used by residents. A third (34%) of survey respondents reported having socialised with other people in parks in the past month and 53% of people reported running into people they know in local parks. After cafés and restaurants (86%), local (76%) and regional (63%) parks were the most commonly used local facilities. This could influence future updates to local land use planning and infrastructure development in Green Square and in future urban renewal areas, as it further confirms that parks are important in facilitating local social interaction.

More than half of residents reported running into people they know in the local area in cafés, restaurants or pubs (56%), local shops (56%), on local streets (56%) and at the entrance to or near the building they live in (54%) and almost half (46%) reporting chatting to people on the street. Local streets are an important location for local social interaction, alongside parks, and one-third (33%) of people said that they would like to see improvements in landscaping in streets and parks.

This is also an important role for more formal community facilities. The use of community or neighbourhood centres increased significantly in 2023 (24%) compared to previous years (10% in 2020

and 13% in 2017). It is possible that this reflects an increased use of community events venues for hosting parties and other social activities. It is also possible that people have become more aware of the facilities available to them in their local area as a result of spending more time in the local area during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Notably, use of neighbourhood and community centres also increased in the neighbouring Ashmore Area over the same period.

Use of local childcare has also increased to 23% in 2023, compared to only 5% in 2020 (the proportion of respondents with children was 24% in 2023 and 15% in 2020). This means that almost all respondents with children have a child of pre-school age who they send to childcare locally. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22 an additional 306 childcare places (service approved by the Department of Education) were provided in the Green Square area. The high proportion of people sending children to childcare locally may also reflect an increase in people working from home. There are forward-planning implications of this with regard to available school spaces in the local area. Notably, the new Green Square public school is currently under construction, and the nearby Alexandria Park community school for grades kindergarten to year 12 has also been completed. This may have influenced the decisions of people with children to live in the area. Notably, use of local childcare also increased in the neighbouring Ashmore area over the same period.

Implications for local business

A large proportion of survey respondents (86%) had visited local cafés or restaurants in the past six months, and many (43%) reported socializing with other people in cafés, restaurants and/or pubs. Such businesses are therefore playing an important social role in the area, and 60% of residents said that they would like to see a wider variety of cafés, restaurants and bars in the area in the future. Residents in the neighbouring Ashmore Area also wanted more cafés, restaurants and/or pubs in the area. The planned development of the Green Square Town Centre should assist in this regard. 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. The City may also consider these findings in targeting local economic development programs.