**Community Feedback Summary**

**Telstra exchange site – Balmain**

**OFFICER’S COMMENTS**

Inner West Council is partnering with Telstra in a project that will create a new landscaped public space on the corner of Darling and Montague Streets, Balmain. The front section of the existing exchange building blocks views of the heritage post office building from areas around the Darling, Rowntree and Montague Streets intersection. The agreement with Telstra involves the demolition of the front part of the exchange building and the conversion of the area to public open space.

A draft landscape design was prepared to start the conversation with the public about the plan. Between 21 February and 20 March 2017, Council asked residents and others for feedback on the draft design of the new public space. There were two drop-in sessions on site on 1 and 4 March 2017 and a survey and opportunity to make comments on Council s “Your Say” page. The survey results and feedback are now made available for the public.

The following are some of the issues that came out of the first round of community engagement.

* Many people expressed a wish that something could be done to improve the Montague Street wall of the Telstra building. Council officers have approached Telstra’s agents to seek permission for Council to commission a mural or otherwise treat this wall.
* Some people wanted trees and shade. Others said that, as a main reason for the project was to open up views of the heritage post office, there should not be anything which then blocks the views.
* A couple of people questioned the need for the area to be raised and others supported the proposal for it to flow from footpath level.

The design is being reviewed in light of the feedback from the community. A report will be prepared for Council.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

Two strong themes emerged from the community’s feedback - trees and seats. Comments received are detailed on the following pages as follows:

1. Online comments - response to landscaping question
2. Online - all other suggestions and comments
3. Comments from drop-in sessions and email
4. Direct comments to Council staff.

**ONLINE RESPONSES**

**Project Highlights**

Total Visits to the project page 490

Photo Views 110

Document Downloads 143

**Do you support the draft design? 92% \***

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**ONLINE COMMENTS**

**19 FEBRUARY – 20 MARCH 2017**

1. **RESPONSE TO LANDSCAPING**

|  |
| --- |
| **Question - What's your opinion on the proposed landscaping?** |
| * A bit hard to tell the greener the better.
 |
| * The paving is good as is the "wall of green" and the planter boxes.
 |
| * Would prefer a grass surface - cooler in summer.
 |
| * Looks good, will be an improvement to the current environment and hopefully a nice new open space along Darling St like the Liberty Square renewal. Any design cues shared between the two spaces would bring cohesion given close proximity and a local theme etc.
 |
| * continuing pavers is likely to be an eyesore - Glebe Point Road does it better.
 |
| * Pathetic!
 |
| * No opinion
 |
| * Looks good but why don't you take the whole exchange away and make a proper park.
 |
| * No opinion, can't really tell from the picture.
 |
| * It looks great, although i would love to see the whole side wall covered in vertical garden too. It's a terribly ugly building.
 |
| * Front landscaping looks good.
 |
| * "See above suggestions- basically OK but room for a few improvements.The power wires festooning the area are very ugly- it would be wonderful to put them underground."
 |
| * More park land required
 |
| * Green wall will soften a brutal intersection and create a friendly meeting spot.
 |
| * It looks good.
 |
| * In general this seems appropriate, provided that it does not become an outdoor assembly site for drinkers from the Town Hall Hotel opposite.
 |
| * I think this heritage precinct eg town hall, court house and library should have a palisade fence eg caste iron with fleur de lys points and sandstone base eg a Victorian fence to match the period. This would act as a protection to the buildings. You can see an example with Sydney town hall. It would stop dogs and people from the pub using it as their free toilet and more importantly preserve the heritage ( that which is surviving ) nature of the corner. In side the Victorian fence Grass with a couple of iron benches. Low maintenance and in keeping with how the architect and major mr Buchanan envisaged.
 |
| * "Fantastic initiative, it will transform this most important place in Balmain and reveal the setting of the heritage landmark Post office tower. Landscaping great, except recommend including extra seating adjacent to the post office in the corner of the square, which is furtherest away from the road noise in a protected nook protected in afternoon from sun with outlook. Recommend moving the stools to in front of the tower and providing a continuous bespoke seat (probably with back rest) either side of public art to give variety of seating type.
 |
| * Looks good.
 |
| * Simple. Blends with the existing footpath.
 |
| * An improvement of the existing street landscape
 |
| * More plants would be nice.
 |
| * "The area is quite exposed so would be hot and exacerbated by concrete.
 |
| * More seating too.
 |
| * "A big improvement compared with current building.
 |
| * Paving, shade trees, & seats are good.
 |
| * A much better setting for the tower"
 |
| * Please use native trees rather than deciduous ones. Some smaller flowering gums would be nice.
 |
| * I like it. It gives the feel of a green uncluttered open space.
 |
| * I support the demolition to allow for better view of the post office building. Whilst the landscaping (seating and vegetation) is highly welcome, they're rather uninspiring in their design. It would be fantastic if elements of heritage interpretation could be incorporated into the seating and/or paving works.
 |
| * Courtyard looks great!
 |
| * "The green wall is a great idea. Heavily planted - as it is north facing and gets great light. Absorbs noise.
 |
| Consider a running water feature on the green wall to absorb noise and improve amenity. High up. Not street level." |
| * Good
 |
| * "Looks good. The vertical garden, which will obscure the end wall of Telstra exchange is an excellent idea.
 |
| * Lighting for safety and to deter anti-social behaviour should be included."
 |
| * "Very good.Please ensure effective lighting is included."
 |
| * Happy to see some more open space and seating in town centre
 |
| * This is in addition to comments and suggestions made at the on-site meeting.
 |
| * The view looking directly from Darling Street is good, given the constraints of the site. However the existing Telstra wall along Montague Street is still very ugly. Would it be possible to put a mural on that wall or arrange for a vertical garden to be placed there to blend in with the green facia planned for Darling Street? If a mural was planned, perhaps Telstra could have some input into a theme in keeping with the rich history of Balmain.
 |
| * "Why did you send me this info after the viewing sessions closed?Received 9/3/17.Up to your normal standards."
 |
| * Hard to say as I can't see it really but I think it would be good if you included a couple of bench seats and correct planting of shrubs trees to provide shade a water spout too.
 |
| * OK
 |
| * Green wall would be amazing and extra public seating good too. Some shady area would be good as lots of mums and babies would like to sit in shade. Public art choices should be bold and colourful not boring.
 |
| * Superb outcome.
 |
| * Looks good but the tree/seat closest to the Darling/Rowntree intersection is difficult to judge since there is no scale marked. If it's location would impair free flow of pedestrian traffic around that corner I would support moving it away from Darling St so that the four trees formed a non rectangular outline.
 |
| * Can hardly tell from the picture. More near the corner to help hide the exchange.
 |
| * Looks good. Paddy McGuinness of the Balmain Secession Movement lobbied strongly for the full removal of the Telstra building during his term on LMC.
 |
| * Not sure if there is enough shade provision being made for people to fully enjoy the open space during summer. What is the watering provision for the 'green wall'? Visually, there is nothing worse than a green wall that is not maintained correctly. Given councils rough treatment of the existing grass verges in the area, is a qualified landscaper going to maintain this area?
 |
| * "Design seems fine but I believe it will need be elevated from the street due to cables remaining underneath so may need changing & allowance of steps .. The very limited size of the area available may mean we have fewer of the seating/planting spaces. I am also uncertain of the wisdom of a green wall considering the maintenance required & I was under the understanding that nothing could be attached to the Telstra building itself. it is a great pity that we cannot demolish all of the Telstra building!"
 |
| * needs a rejig I think
 |
| * Looks great!
 |

1. **ALL OTHER SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

**TREES**

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| --- |
| reduce to 3 trees;trees of type limited in height, preferably that do not drop leaves with change of seasons as will become a slip/fall hazard; needs some permanent canopy for shade and rain cover; some reduction in floor space to allow prams and wheelchair access." |
| Instead of four small trees, plant one large central tree. Instead of four bench-table assemblies put park benches around the southern and western periphery facing towards the centre. |
| * "I like it but is it possible to put a mural or a vertical garden on the eastern wall in Roundtree st? You have a beautiful new space and a ugly brick wall jutting up against it.
 |
| * One less tree would open the space a little more. Maybe seats/small divided benches instead of stools.
 |
| The whole object about demolishing the front of the Telephone Exchange was to open up the view of the side of the historic Post Office building. From your design photograph the only view is of the trees not the "Post and Telegraph Office" carved stonework and the windows below |
| * "Any tree planting should be protected. Vandalism has impacted Myrtle trees planted on Darling Street (outside Post Office & Magistrates' Court)"
 |
|  |
| * Follow updated landscaping all the way in front of courthouse on Darling street. Also repaint courthouse to match new 'exposed' tower. Currently courthouse looks very scrappy.
 |
| * More shade and less concrete
 |
| * "It doesn't go far enough. Get rid of more of the exchange. If that can't be done, at least do something to soften the Montague St frontage of the remaining exchange. Almost anything would improve the current brutal ugliness of the wall right up against the boundary. Can it be set back with trees in front?GPO/Telecom/Telstra seems to have sordid history of !#$%^ up streetscapes and views, doesn't it? Wouldn't it be good if they volunteered to be subject to planning controls."
 |
| * " Include adequate lighting for evening to aid usage & safety ( maybe uplighting under trees?). Consider graffiti in use of materials and surfaces. Include a refuse station to reduce litter.I like the green wall - hopefully it can be durable and easy to maintain.."
 |
| * A second raised planter at the foot of the 'green wall' would provide an enhanced '3D' effect, rather than an abrubt delineation of the paving into the green wall, adding depth to the overall space
 |
| * Maximise shade in the area with very leafy trees to minimise heat as there are many hard surfaces and it will be hot in summer. Will the green wall be irrigated with tank water?
 |
| * Big trees
 |

**SEATS**

|  |
| --- |
| * More seating!
 |
| * Wharf post seats could be in groups to encourage conversation? Also need shade. No metal seats please- cold in winter, hot in summer. Public art could be a solar powered water feature for summer coolness to offset heat island effect of paving. Public art could also feature a plaque to James Barnet the celebrated colonial architect who designed the PO and courthouse. Any chance the buildings could be painted, please?
 |
| * "More seating and a clearer idea of planting taking in the level of the building - a number of steps go up to the entrance. Worry about maintenance of free wall - will it be self watering and what about weeds etc"
 |

**OTHER**

|  |
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| * Yes but as it's a small space it shouldn't become too cluttered.
 |
| * There is no detail provided regarding any make-good or renovation of the former post office features. Ideally the decorative elements, if not the balcony, will be returned as per the original colonial architect's plans.
 |
| * It would be great if you could include easy access to power at this site, or some type of smart pole - this would allow Inner West Council to install a WiFi hotspot and extend the Council-provided WiFi network which already exists along this stretch of Darling Street.
 |
| * I am delighted that something along these lines is being done but very disappointed that so little of the dreadful exchange building is being removed. I was expecting more of it to be removed. Judging by the drawing, only a small front section is going. Much better than nothing but would love to see more of it removed.
 |
| * The entire ugly phone exchange building should go, not only the northern part.
 |
| * Perhaps break up the space so it doesn't appear so symmetrical.
 |
| * "Having spoken to Patrick and Bronwyn (?) today at Council's ""meet, greet, display and discuss"" session in front of the Balmain Telephone Exchange I would like to add a couple of ideas to my previous comments. My concern is that the square is small and it is important that it doesn't appear cluttered and so my first suggestion is that it might be possible to combine the green wall concept with a public artwork by using different plants to form a ""growing artwork"". It could, for instance, be an image of William Balmain. Alternatively a sculpture or sculptures could be incorporated into the green wall.
 |
| My second suggestion involves Telstra. The difference between the beauty of the new plaza and the rest of the Telstra Exchange is going to be marked, to say the least. If Telstra could be persuaded to brick up the metal-grated windows in the Montague Street side of the exchange, put an awning over the footpath and apply some paint it would go a long way to disguising the ""blockhouse"" look of the exchange. Extending the green wall around the corner would also help soften the difference between the front and side of the exchange. " |
| * A running water feature on the green wall to absorb noise and improve amenity. High up. Not street level."
 |
| * "Please put some bins in the area. Loyalty square was upgraded with no bins added. There is always litter everywhere and the few bins close by are always overflowing with rubbish. How do you propose to prevent people loitering in this area like they do in Loyalty Square?"
 |
| * The paving to be changed to a fan design originating in the back corner, with lines fanning out in all directions. When you are in the area it will draw your eye to look outward from the area.
 |
| * Could a filtered water fountain be included please
 |
| * There may not be enough room on the pavement along Montague St, but if the remaining part of the Telstra Exchange building could be treated in the same way as the end of the building facing Darling St (i.e covered in greenery), that would improve the street view even further.
 |
| * The Telstra building should be demolished in total as it's a disgraceful eyesaw and the public park extended across the full area to return the original grounds around the PO.
 |
| * The old exchange is a monstrosity. I'd favour its complete demolition with all the land around the post office given over to a bigger public space. Nevertheless, the proposal is a very welcome start.
 |
| * The Post Office building is very shabby. It needs a paint job. If the front of the exchange is to removed, the frontage of the "new" exchange should probably be reworked in a style reminiscent of the fashion of 1914.
 |
| * Let's have a fountain with a low sandstone wall that people can sit on . Kids can play in the fountain in summer. And the high brick wall should have edgy murals from young artists that play on the history and modernity of Balmain. The mural should be replaced every year , or 6 months even.
 |
| * "Use this as an opportunity to restore and refurbish the entire streetscape along the historic precinct to the town hall. That includes the post office, court house and police station. The post office clock tower is an important feature of the this project. The shabby condition of this beautiful Victorian building risks an important part of our community heritage and the council should be enforcing relevant heritage maintenance requirements. This is an opportunity to do it in a coordinated way. The town hall restoration work is fabulous and would complement the work on the Telstra Exchange site as book ends to the heritage precinct.
 |
| Also consider: |
| Plaque acknowledging country for the Eora nation - and the people (is it Gadigal here?) |
| For visitors to Balmain, a small interpretive historic trail sign to show civic and natural highlights. |

1. **COMMENTS MADE AT ON-SITE DROP IN SESSIONS AND BY EMAIL**

**1 - 4 March 2017**

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| **TREES**  |
| My view on any landscaping would be to minimize structures and concrete, avoid steps, provide suitable attractive seating and plant low maintenance shrubs (not trees) that will attract native birds. An historic mural on the non heritage wall would be an interesting inclusion. |
| Is idea of trees set in concrete? |
| Trees –will they restrict the view of the post office once grown? Inside there is “Post and Telegraph Office” inscribed approx 6-7 m.  |
| Trees – check underground cabling with regard to tree roots. (*Officer comment: Depth limit of easement means there cannot be any deep planting*.) |
| Not enough grass. Like the green wall, softens the hardness |
| Deciduous trees |
| Shade |
| Community herb garden within planter box / rosemary, thyme |
| Planters as per Macquarie |
| Would like to keep the purple flowering shrub in garden bed near Montague Street door. |
| **SEATS**  |
| Seats in plan are not supportive of incidental conversation |
| Need provision for a public phone. Nice to have somewhere to sit. Green wall is good opens. Lots of seats. Public art good. Montague Street wall, good to continue round. |
| Like the plans. Seating – Balmain doesn’t have a lot of seating. Flower beds good. As much green as possible. Shade. Don’t cover up post office. No fencing. |
| Seating and shade |
| More comfortable seats / seats integrated in planter box |
| Seating and shade is key. Love the idea of covering the ugly wall on both sides please. |
| Approve idea of open space next to historic P.O. Seating in not appropriate. |
|  |
| **OTHER**  |
| Keep the design simple |
| Request that the other heritage buildings in the square are maintained. Even though they are privately owned they are part of the shared community heritage.  |
| Why not a multi-storeyed car park, screened with green wall. Need parking. |
| Paint the Montague Street wall |
| Would like to knock down more building and have a larger space. Green wall is fabulous, better to spend more on that. Public art needs to be “site-responsive.” Green wall wrapped around Montague Street would be good. |
| Any thought to Telstra doing anything along the Montague Street wall? |
| Look at the photos of the original exchange. Reduce size of Post Office sign on pole (next to tug boat |
| Montague side wall. |
| Simpler |
| Want the phone box |
| Traffic light box needs to stay but not shown on plan or photomontage. It could be repainted. |
| Concerns over previous comments by Telstra about underground cables, had said there may need to be a podium. (*Officer comment: Podium not required although there is a limit of 1m under present ground level.)* |
| Too much building work in suburb. Not enough parking |
| Rather nice, as long as can have dogs there |
| Suggestion to implement temporary public art, program on a monthly basis (x2) themed to the heritage |
| Need to improve the Montague Street side too, integrated design |
| Monument to a local person/event |
| Would like to see the Montague Street side have a painting, be improved |
| Would like to see a public phone in place. May be the last one left in Balmain. Used by the person making this comment. |
| Great initiative. |
| Good to see action taken at last |
| Subtle art, incorporation of site responsive art if at all |
| Great! Somewhere to sit in sunshine and enjoy a coffee. Much better than current fascia. |
| Temporary public art |
| Support any park development. This is a great start. |
| Address Telstra remaining façade ie dress up. Verandah? Or awning like outside Woolworths. |
| Integrated art within green wall |
| Lighting / projection at night |
|  |

1. **COMMENTS TO COUNCIL STAFF AT ON SITE DROP IN SESSIONS**

**1 - 4 March 2017**

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| --- |
| Many people expressed a wish that something could be done to improve the Montague Street wall of the Telstra building. Council officers have approached Telstra’s agents to seek permission for Council to commission a mural or otherwise treat this wall. |
| Some people wanted trees and shade. Others said that, as a main reason for the project was to open up views of the heritage post office, there should not be anything which then blocks the views. |
| A couple of people questioned the need for the area to be raised and others supported the proposal for it to flow from footpath level. |