

Relevant Information for Council

FILE: X119331 **DATE:** 19 March 2026

TO: Lord Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Graham Jahn AM, Chief Planner / Executive Director City Planning, Development and Transport

SUBJECT: Information Relevant To Item 9.3 – Public Exhibition - Planning Proposal - Special Entertainment Precincts - Sydney Local Environment Plan 2012, Sydney Development Control Plan 2012 Amendment and Precincts Management Plan

For Noting

This memo is for the information of the Lord Mayor and Councillors.

Purpose

To provide Council with additional information.

Background

At the meeting of the Transport, Heritage and Planning Committee on 16 March 2026, further information was sought on the following matters.

Why are our sound criteria lower than those in NSW Government Special Entertainment Precinct Acoustic Toolkit?

The Special Entertainment Precinct (SEP) framework is designed for councils to set sound levels that are appropriate for their local context. The Acoustic Toolkit provides general information about how to understand entertainment sound criteria and includes example criteria for reference only. The Toolkit strongly recommends Councils seek specialised advice to ensure criteria suit the context of local precincts.

In line with the Toolkit guidance, our criteria are calibrated to real world background and ambient sound levels, and account for existing levels of sound from businesses to ensure businesses are not disadvantaged. In addition, the criteria has been developed with bespoke approaches not in the Toolkit including exemptions for patron noise in outdoor dining before 10pm and permit more sound in commercial areas with different criteria for non-residential receivers (for example +10dB commercial and +8dB hotel).

The sound plan balances support for live music and a vibrant night time economy, while ensuring the City remains a great place to live for a wide range of people. The acoustic consultants have tested types of nightlife activity would be enabled under our criteria.

By contrast, the Toolkit does not publish the acoustic report or assumptions underpinning its example criteria (for example, the assumed background noise levels or building acoustic performance). Notably, the Toolkit draws on Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, a former industrial area without existing sensitive uses and therefore not comparable to most of the City of Sydney LGA, where almost all residential uses exist and are well established.

For these reasons, our criteria reflect local evidence, protect amenity, and continue to enable night time activity in a way that is tailored to our mixed-use urban context.

Advice on potential changes to sound criteria

Our proposed criteria balance support for live music and a vibrant night time economy with the need to maintain reasonable residential amenity.

This is best achieved by setting sound levels relative to the existing background and ambient sound levels. Higher background levels in certain areas, such as main streets, allow venues to operate more loudly without impacting residents.

The weekend criteria proposed for Sound Category Area 1 (SCA1) (covering the loudest precincts such as Central Sydney) reflects observed higher background levels compared to the week, rather than a general acceptance of higher sound impacts.

Because a venue may sit in one Sound Category Area (SCA) and the nearest affected receiver in another, we recommend maintaining a consistent method for deriving criteria across all SCAs where possible to ensure clarity and fairness for operators and residents.

In response to the request from Committee, below is advice from our acoustic consultants on the questions of:

- Considering more lenient weekend sound criteria
- Moving to a 'reasonable amenity' approach for SCA3 and SCA4
- Extending the outdoor dining sound criteria exemption from 10pm to midnight on the weekend

For context, sound perception varies greatly from person to person, so it is difficult to describe the specific impact an increase may have, however, generally:

- 1 dB increase is barely perceptible.
- 2-3 dB increase is perceptible.
- 10 dB increase is experienced as roughly a doubling of loudness

- 'Inaudible' is also subjective

Considering more lenient weekend sound criteria in all SCAs - Day and evening (7am to 10pm)

Generally, daytime background and ambient sound levels are lower on the weekend than during the week. Despite that, there may be higher tolerance for sound during the weekend, noting fewer people are working or studying in their workplace or at home.

The alternative criteria in Attachment A move from background + 8dB to background +10dB on the weekends. This represents a relatively small increase in terms of impact but presents more flexibility for venue operators, and the impacts during those times are likely to be acceptable for most residents.

If this option is preferred, our consultants would not recommend going beyond background +10dB as levels above this point begin to exceed typical ambient sound (background sound plus intermittent sounds) and become more difficult to manage, particularly in certain contexts.

Considering more lenient weekend sound criteria in all SCAs - Early night (10pm to midnight)

Background and ambient levels during early night are generally the same on weekends and weekdays (with the exception of SCA1).

This period represents the peak trading time for hospitality and entertainment venues. There may be higher tolerance to sound during the weekend.

The alternative criteria in Attachment A include an increase in the weekend early-night criteria, which will be equivalent to increasing from background +5dB to background +8dB. While the acoustic data supports this increase only for SCA1, applying it across all SCAs could be justified on broader policy grounds, including residents' capacity to sleep in on weekends and the provision of lower "respite night" thresholds during the week.

Background +5dB aligns with the City's existing development consent conditions, and increasing to +8dB represents a modest and manageable adjustment that could support business activity without creating unreasonable amenity impacts. However, the 10pm–midnight period is also when many residents begin preparing for or attempting sleep, and for this reason any increase beyond +8dB is not recommended.

Considering a 'reasonable amenity' approach for SCA3 and SCA4 (midnight to 7am)

The alternative criteria in Attachment A includes a change for SCA3 and SCA4 from a 'generally inaudible' approach to a 'reasonable amenity' approach for both weekdays and weekends, across all time periods, consistent with the Technical Acoustic Report.

The 'reasonable amenity' criterion is designed to protect sleep for most people, whereas 'generally inaudible' aims for levels that most people will not hear most of the time.

This shift equates to an increase of approximately 3 dB, with larger differences in some octave bands (for example, up to 13 dB at 125 Hz) due to the differing shapes of the threshold-of-hearing curve and the Defra curve. Further detail on this approach is provided in the Technical Acoustic Report.

Overall, the change provides modest additional capacity for venues to make sound after midnight while still maintaining a reasonable level of protection for residential amenity.

Considering more lenient weekend sound criteria in SCA1 - Late night (midnight to 7am)

Going beyond the 'reasonable amenity' criteria on weekends would only be supported in SCA1, where existing ambient levels are substantially higher than the relevant background levels.

In SCA1, the current criteria are already more relaxed in the low-frequency bands than in other SCAs (background -3 rather than background -6 for 'reasonable amenity'). Because measured ambient levels in this area sit well above the background level, the consultants advise that a further increase of 2 dB in the late-night dB and 63–250 Hz criteria on weekends would be acceptable. However, no increase is recommended at 31.5 Hz and no increases beyond the 'reasonable amenity' approach are supported for any other SCA due to the lower ambient levels and health impacts of sleep disturbance.

The staff's recommendation is to exhibit the sound criteria unchanged.

Extending the outdoor patron sound exemption on weekends (10pm to midnight)

It is not recommended that the existing exemption for outdoor patron noise (7am–10pm) be extended to midnight on weekends. However, as described above, the sound criteria could be increased on weekends which helps support outdoor dining.

The greatest amenity risk arises for residences located close to outdoor dining areas, particularly older buildings with single-glazed or timber sash windows that offer minimal acoustic attenuation.

Unlike an increase in criteria, an exemption represents an unknown level of impact. Noise from outdoor patrons - especially later in the evening when alcohol consumption increases - can be highly variable and may cause significant impacts. While research varies on when "standard" sleep periods begin, a number of public-policy benchmarks in Sydney, including the Sydney Airport curfew (11pm–6am), recognise the late-evening period as sensitive for residential amenity.

In SEPs, outdoor dining will benefit from automatic approval to 10pm in all three tiers, with businesses able to apply through a development application or footway approval to trade outdoors until midnight in City Living areas and 1am in Late Night Management Areas. These later hours can continue to operate where sound criteria are met (for example where reasonable separation exists rather than residential receivers directly overlooking or adjoining outdoor dining areas).

Recent community feedback from the Outdoor Dining Guidelines consultation also highlighted concerns about more noise from expanded outdoor dining across our city.

For these reasons, extending the exemption for outdoor patron noise to midnight on weekends is not recommended.

Entertainment Sound Management Maps

The Entertainment Sound Management DCP maps identify areas close to performances venues in which a development must attenuate against the existing sound from the venue.

The maps shown at Attachment B2 to the Committee report are included to show consequent changes to the Late Night Trading DCP and the application of SEP sound criteria.

The update is not a review of the venues covered by this existing section of the DCP.

Individual venues were originally identified according to their historical and current live music and performance offering. Not all pubs in the local area were included.

How many late-night venues have taken up additional hours in the 24-hour precinct in Alexandria?

The following night trading venues operate in North Alexandria:

- 2 Halfs Brewing & Distilling - Trades until 10pm Friday and Saturday
- Bar No. 5/The Spice Plantation - Trades until 9pm
- Kiss My Axe - Trades until 10pm
- Blackwattle Brewery - Trades until midnight Friday and Saturday

Bracket Brewing was previously operating in the area but has relocated to Marrickville.

Provide the rationale for the inclusion of Meagher Street, Chippendale and consideration of the day/night balance in this area

In November 2025, Council unanimously endorsed a motion requesting staff to investigate establishing or extending a special entertainment precinct (SEP) to include The Chipppo Hotel and The Rose Hotel. This motion followed a community petition advocating for their inclusion.

City staff undertook a review of the area including considering land use data, venue density, planning controls, the City's Cultural and Economic Development Strategies, site visits, acoustic data, transport accessibility and compliance history. This assessment considered both the merits and potential negative impacts of a SEP, as well as which of the 3 SEP tiers, if any, would be appropriate.

This section of Meagher and Abercrombie Street is a mixed-use cluster comprising existing live music venues, commercial units and creative spaces. On this basis, the area has been considered for Local Centre designation, which is the lowest SEP tier and specifically designed to support evening and early-night activity for local communities while managing close relationships with neighbouring residential properties.

Speakers at Council's public forum were concerned the SEP would automatically permit trading to 2 am in this area. This is incorrect. Local centre hours are modest:

- Category A (more than 120 patrons): base 10 pm, extended to midnight for live music
- Category B (less than 120 patrons): base 11 pm, extended to 1 am for live music

Local Centre hours do not allow The Chipppo to trade any later than their existing approval

Sound criteria would manage impacts on nearby residents. A SEP does not remove obligations on venues and we still expect operators to take measures to manage their impacts on neighbours, for example closing windows and doors after 10 pm.

Extending the SEP along Meagher Street captures two venues that already contribute to the local centre's evening offer - The Chipppo and Sneaky Possum. The area also contains a co-working space and two galleries that periodically host events, as well as 2-3 vacant commercial units that may activate over time. The site of the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas is included.

SEP designation also provides flexibility for day trading businesses, like cafes, who may want to trade later occasionally or on a regular basis, without the cost of going through a development application.

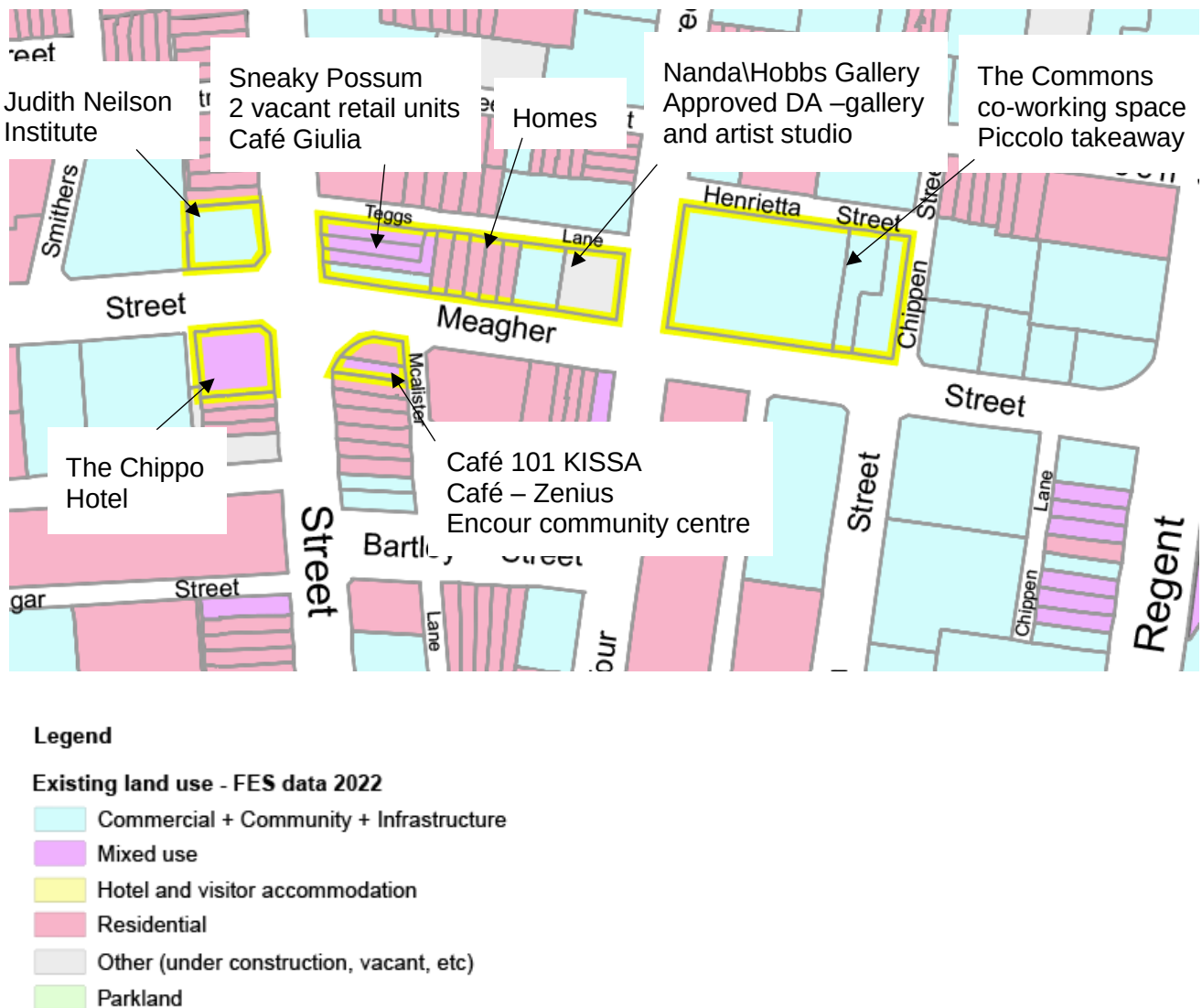


Figure 1: Land uses along Meagher Street, Chippendale

If Council supports the proposed approach, the next step would be public consultation. This would provide an opportunity for us to notify affected residents, businesses and stakeholders of the proposed changes, and to hear from the full spectrum of the community. We would report back to Council with the feedback before a decision is made.

Explain why The Rose is not proposed for inclusion

By contrast to Meagher Street / Abercrombie Street, The Rose Hotel sits within an R1 zoned residential neighbourhood rather than a mixed-use or employment cluster. While it is a valued neighbourhood venue, it is not part of an existing or emerging cluster and given the surrounding zoning is not in a potential cluster. It is therefore not recommended for inclusion.

Our approach to special entertainment precincts is precinct-focused, considering clusters and potential clusters of late trading businesses and cultural activity. Standalone neighbourhood pubs, like The Rose Hotel, are not part of our special entertainment precincts, but their role and value are not diminished:

- Most have long-standing consents for later trading hours. The Rose is already approved to trade until midnight Monday to Saturday.
- Requests for trading hour extensions in the centre of R1 residential areas are best managed through the development assessment process, in consultation with the community. This allows for proper consideration of their specific context.
- They already have access to Liquor & Gaming NSW's incentives if they register as a dedicated venue, including 80% off their liquor licence fees.



Figure 2: Zoning around The Rose (outlined in red)

Explain why Vine Street and The Eveleigh are proposed for inclusion

The Vine Street area is a longstanding late night trading area. It was included in the mapping for the special entertainment precinct discussion paper last year.

While it is zoned R1, unlike the Rose, The Eveleigh Hotel sits on the boundary of a long-standing Vine Street late night trading area, is part of a cluster of businesses and is directly adjacent to a mixed use zone.

Relevant to the future context of the Vine Street area, there is a recently proposed State Significant DA for 2-14 Vine Street, 16-30 Vine Street and 32-34 Eveleigh Street (SSD 70066710 - "Hudson Vine Mixed Use Development"). This will involve apartments, commercial units, and basement and ground floor hospitality uses with proposed trading until midnight Thursday to Sunday.

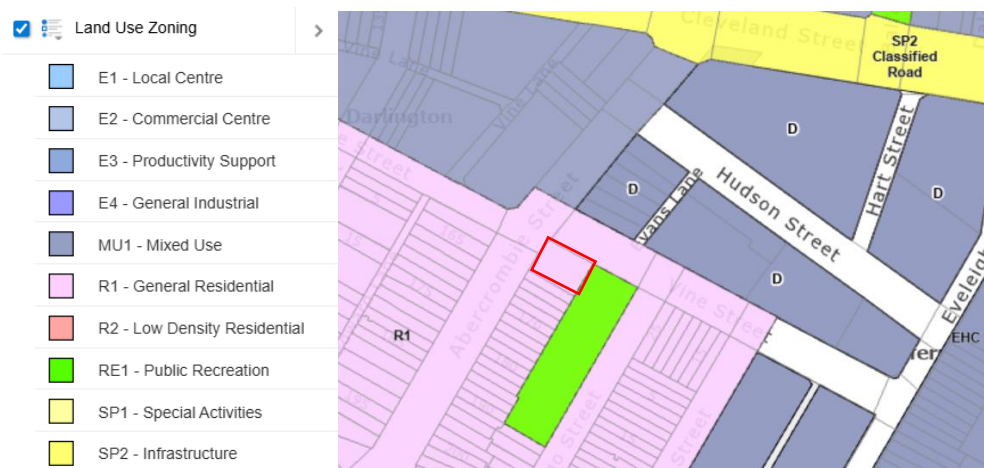


Figure 3 Zoning around The Eveleigh Hotel (outline in red).



Figure 4 Late night trading areas around The Eveleigh Hotel (outline in red)

Reviewing SEP categories and tiers, and adding new areas

Our late night trading areas were designated in 2007 and comprehensively reviewed in 2019 informed by detailed analysis and extensive public consultation.

In summer 2024/25, we again sought community feedback this time on our proposal to designate all existing late-night trading areas as special entertainment precincts. The discussion paper was publicly exhibited for 8 weeks, and the survey specifically asked whether any areas should be added, removed, upgraded or downgraded. More than 350 submissions were received. All feedback was assessed, and recommended amendments were reported to Council in [March 2025](#).

Following that report, Council resolved to investigate upgrading the late-night trading tier of 6 locations. Additional feedback through the Lord Mayor's Business Chamber Roundtable (August 2025) and a subsequent Council resolution (November 2025) identified 3 more areas for review. City staff have since completed assessments of all 9 locations and the findings are included in the current Council report.

Councillors asked specifically about 2 locations:

- **Universities** – UTS provided a submission to the discussion paper, and an amendment is proposed to capture where they have a late trading venue on campus.

- Roslyn Street, Ward Avenue and Victoria Street, Potts Point** – These streets are already included in the proposal. Kings Cross is designated as the highest-tier late-night area, stepping down to a local-centre tier as land uses transition away from the commercial core.

Feedback on these streets during the discussion paper consultation was mixed: 7 respondents suggested removing parts of the area, while 4 recommended upgrading sections. No submissions were received from local businesses. On balance, the City considered that the existing settings remain appropriate.

Role of Community Improvement Districts in SEP Governance

Community Improvement Districts (CIDs) are an emerging governance model in NSW. Within the City's local area, we're aware of a few precinct groups working towards becoming a CID. If these CIDs are established, they will offer an additional platform for coordinated precinct management and business collaboration. However, they will not necessarily overlap or be colocated with a special entertainment precinct.

CIDs are initiated by businesses in an area and cannot be imposed by councils. Where a CID is established following a formal ballot process it will cover all businesses operating in that area and will not be limited to businesses involved in or providing entertainment-based uses.

The creation of a CID requires consultation with local councils and a resolution for the support of a CID following a successful ballot process. Further updates will be provided as any CID proposals in the local government area progress.

The City's special entertainment precincts will continue to closely involve established business and precinct groups, including Purple Flag precincts, Uptown Precincts, local business chambers and associations, and liquor accords. As CIDs formalise, they can be incorporated into this network to strengthen shared communication, coordinated activation, and proactive precinct stewardship.

Our staff maintain strong relationships with these groups by attending meetings and forums to share information, discuss emerging issues and opportunities, and support collaboration between businesses, residents and precinct leaders. We also provide a dedicated Concierge service, giving businesses a single point of contact to raise issues, seek guidance or request support.

Key issues or emerging trends identified through this engagement will be reported to the Nightlife and Creative Industries Advisory Panel, which acts as our precincts working group and provides strategic oversight. Any changes to SEP policy settings ultimately remain a matter for Council.

**Memo from Graham Jahn AM, Chief Planner / Executive Director City Planning,
Development and Transport**

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Attachment

Attachment A. Alternative Sound Criteria - Precincts Management Plan - Special
Entertainment Precincts

Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'GJAHN', positioned below the 'Approved' line.

GRAHAM JAHN AM

Chief Planner / Executive Director City
Planning, Development and Transport

Attachment A

**Alternative Sound Criteria – Special
Entertainment Precincts Management Plan**

Special entertainment precincts management plan



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Introduction

The purpose of this plan

This plan aims to provide balanced management of nightlife by supporting late-night activity and live music and performance while also protecting local amenity and managing potential impacts.

The plan should help establish operational certainty for existing and future businesses and residents.

The purpose of the plan is to set trading hours and sound levels for businesses within special entertainment precincts.

How this plan applies

This plan applies to special entertainment precincts identified in [\[add section\]](#) of the Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 and shown in figure 1 and at [\[add link\]](#).

In terms of sound, the plan:

- **does** regulate sound from entertainment activity from premises within a special entertainment precinct
- does **not** regulate other types of sound, such as mechanical ventilation, construction or waste management
- does **not** address sound from temporary events in public space, for example a parade in the street, market in a square, concert in a park, or busking
- does **not** regulate sound from private homes.

In terms of trading hours, the plan:

- **does** set trading hours for all premises in the special entertainment precinct including both licensed and unlicensed businesses
- **does** override trading hours set by condition in a development consent
- does **not** derogate from existing approved trading hours where they are longer than those available under the plan
- **does** provide 'extended' hours with development consent
- does **not** set or override liquor licence trading hours – these continue to be regulated by Liquor & Gaming NSW.

In terms of management and compliance, the plan:

- **does** set our approach to governing, monitoring and evaluating the special entertainment precincts
- **does** establish processes for Council-led regulation of premises within a special entertainment precinct, including regulating trading hours and managing noise complaints for unlicensed premises

Special entertainment precincts management plan

- does **not** establish processes for managing noise complaints for licensed premises – these processes are managed by Liquor & Gaming NSW.

The plan does **not** apply to adult entertainment, sex services and restricted premises. This is a restriction imposed by the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Objectives

The objectives of the special entertainment precincts are to:

1. Enable businesses to invest in and offer more live music, culture, entertainment and performance as part of their regular activities
2. Foster vibrant, inclusive, mixed-use neighbourhoods that support local community amenity
3. Improve quality, safety and diversity of the late-night offering
4. Enhance economic outcomes, supporting businesses to thrive
5. Streamline the process for businesses and the City of Sydney to make it easier and more affordable to operate late night trading premises

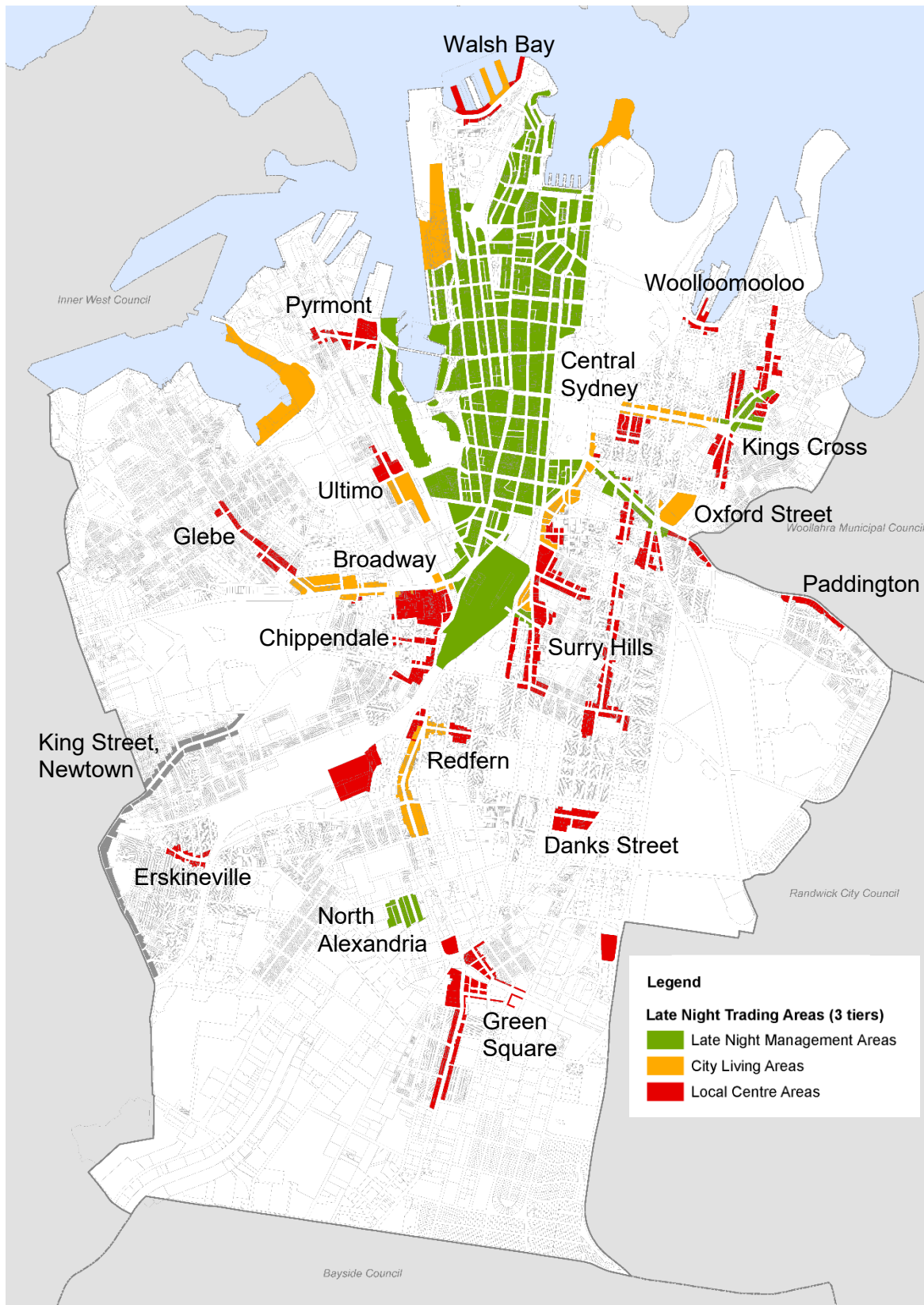


Figure 2. Special entertainment precincts map

Trading hours

How businesses can trade later

More flexibility for businesses

Businesses in a special entertainment precinct may trade up to the hours shown in figures 2 to 4.

These hours override any condition for trading hours on a development consent.

The plan does not apply to adult entertainment, sex services and restricted premises.

Businesses with existing approvals to trade later than the hours listed in figures 2 to 4 may continue to do so.

Businesses may lodge a development application for extended hours available under the Sydney DCP 2012, with renewals and further extensions under the existing trial period process.

Liquor & Gaming NSW establishes liquor licence trading hours

Premises that are licensed to sell alcohol will have 2 sets of trading hours:

- DA trading hours in their conditions of consent
- Liquor licence trading hours – not affected by this plan.

Businesses with a liquor licence that is more restrictive than the special entertainment precinct hours in figures 4 to 6 must contact Liquor & Gaming NSW to amend their licence conditions.

Identifying the trading hours that apply to a business

Three late night trading tiers

There are 3 tiers of late-night trading with their own trading hours. To check which tier applies, use the map at figure 1 or [\[link\]](#).

- Late Night Management (green areas) – see trading hours in Figure 2
- City Living (yellow areas) – see trading hours in Figure 3
- Local Centres (red areas) – see trading hours in Figure 4

Three business categories

Trading hours also vary for different categories of business. Lower impact venues can trade a bit later. The categories are:

- **Category A – High impact premises:** These are venues that sell alcohol and have capacity for more than 120 patrons. Examples include hotels, pubs, nightclubs and karaoke venues. This category also includes dedicated performance venues like theatres or concert halls with a capacity for more than 250 patrons.
- **Category B – Low impact premises:** These venues may sell alcohol and have capacity for less 120 patrons, or any commercial premises that may trade late and have the potential to impact on local amenity or safety. Examples include bars, small bars and some pubs and restaurants. It also includes unlicensed premises such as gyms in residential buildings, takeaway food shops and convenience stores. This category is for dedicated performance venues with a capacity for up to 250 patrons.
- **Category C – Unlicensed premises:** These include any retail premises or business premises that does not sell, supply or allow the consumption of liquor on or off the premises or hold any licence under the *Liquor Act 2007*. Examples include grocery stores, clothing stores, bookstores, homewares, dry cleaners, banks and hairdressers. This category does not include takeaways, cafes and restaurants, convenience stores, gyms in residential buildings and convenience stores.

Figure 2. Late night management area trading hours

		Category A Larger venues and nightclubs		Category B Small bars, clubs and restaurants		Category C Unlicensed shops and hairdressers
		Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor
Late Night Management areas Including Central Sydney, Oxford Street and Kings Cross	SEP hours – no approval needed	6am to midnight	9am to 10pm	6am to 2am	7am to 10pm	6am to 2am
	Program incentive*	To 1am	–	To 3am	–	–
	Dedicated venue*	To 2am	–	To 4am	–	–

*Businesses must meet eligibility requirements and be on Liquor & Gaming NSW's approved list to access incentive hours. Please see 'How to access live music and performance incentives' below.

Figure 3. City living area trading hours

		Category A Larger venues and nightclubs		Category B Small bars, clubs and restaurants		Category C Unlicensed shops and hairdressers
		Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor
City Living areas Including Barangaroo, Broadway and William Street	SEP hours – no approval needed	7am to 11pm	9am to 10pm	7am to 1am	7am to 10pm	7am to 1am
	Program incentive*	To midnight	–	To 2am	–	–
	Dedicated venue*	To 1am	–	To 3am	–	–

Figure 4. Local centre trading hours

		Category A Larger venues and nightclubs		Category B Small bars, clubs and restaurants		Category C Unlicensed shops and hairdressers
		Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor
Local Centre areas Including Crown Street, Glebe Point Road and Chippendale	SEP hours – no approval needed	7am to 10pm	9am to 10pm	7am to 11pm	7am to 10pm	7am to 11pm
	Program incentive*	To 11pm	–	To midnight	–	–
	Dedicated venue*	To midnight	–	To 1am	–	–

*Businesses must meet eligibility requirements and be on Liquor & Gaming NSW's approved list to access incentive hours. Please see 'How to access live music and performance incentives' below.

How to access live music and performance incentives

We want more live music, performance, and cultural programming across our local area.

Liquor & Gaming NSW offer incentives for putting on live music and performance:

- 80% discount on liquor licence fees
- on the night of a performance, a 2-hour trading extension (see dedicated venue hours in figures 2 to 4)
- with regular performances, 1-hour trading extension every day (see program incentive hours in figures 2 to 4)

To access these incentives, businesses need to meet Liquor & Gaming NSW's eligibility criteria and be on their published [list of approved venues](#). Businesses can apply to be added to the list on the [Liquor and Gaming NSW website](#).

Once a business is on Liquor & Gaming NSW's approved list of venues, the incentive hours in figures 2 to 4 can override an existing development consent. This means a DA modification is not required to access the dedicated venue or program incentive hours.

How to apply for extended trading hours

Businesses may be able to trade later than the hours in figures 2 to 4 by applying for extended hours shown in figure 5 through a development application.

Businesses must apply to renew extended hours after the first 2 years, and then every 5 years. This allows us to work with venue operators to make sure late trading continues to be well managed.

To access 'extended' trading hours businesses will need to apply with:

- an application to modify an existing development consent
- a statement of environmental effects
- an updated plan of management that covers the proposed extended hours
- a noise impact assessment may be required, depending on the business type and activity.

Extended hours are governed by Section 3.15 Late Trading Management in the Sydney Development Control Plan 2012 at [\[add link\]](#)

For advice, you can speak to a duty planner [\[add link\]](#).

Figure 5. Extended trading hours – approval is required

		Category A Larger venues and nightclubs		Category B Small bars, clubs and restaurants		Category C Unlicensed shops and hairdressers
		Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor	Outdoor	Indoor
Late night management	Extended	24 hours	9am to 1am	24 hours	7am to 1am	24 hours
City Living	Extended	7am to 5am	9am to midnight	6am to 5am	7am to midnight	24 hours
Local centre areas	Extended	7am to midnight	9am to 10pm	6am to midnight/2 am*	7am to 10pm	6am to 2am

*Proposals for extended indoor hours may be approved to 2am but only where entry and exit of all patrons will be on a main street and not a laneway, or mainly residential area.

Sound plan

This section outlines sound criteria for the regulation of sound from entertainment activity in commercial premises in special entertainment precincts.

In terms of sound, the plan:

- **does** regulate entertainment sound from premises within a special entertainment precinct
- does **not** regulate other types of sound, such as mechanical ventilation, construction or waste management
- does **not** address sound for temporary uses, for example events in public space or busking
- does **not** regulate sound from private homes.

Liquor & Gaming NSW is the lead regulator for entertainment sound from licensed premises.

The City of Sydney is the lead regulator for entertainment sound from unlicensed premises.

This sound plan overrides the existing noise rules in development consents and liquor licences with one simpler, consistent approach for all special entertainment precincts.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Entertainment sound	Includes sound from music, other types of entertainment such as karaoke or trivia and patron noise.
Venue	A business of any type (including food and beverage, entertainment, retail) which is or could be the source of entertainment sound.
Receiver	A property affected by entertainment sound. Most often the receiver is a residential property, but it could also be medical facilities, hotel or visitor accommodation or education facilities.
Decibel (dB)	Decibel (dB) is the unit used for measuring noise levels.
dBA	A-weighted decibels (dBA) measure in way that reflects how the human ear hears different frequencies. This scale matches well with how people experience loudness. An increase or decrease of about 10dB sounds roughly twice as loud or half as loud, while a change of 2 to 3dB is barely noticeable.

Term	Definition
Frequency	The rate of repetition of a sound wave. Frequency is measured in Hertz (Hz), or cycles per second. Human hearing ranges from around 20Hz to 20kHz (2000Hz).
Octave band	The most used frequency bands are octave bands, in which the centre frequency of each band is twice that of the band below it.
Low frequency	Long wavelength sound associated with low musical notes, bass and rumble. The audible low frequency octave bands of interest in room acoustics and sound insulation reviews are usually from 31.5Hz to 125Hz or 250Hz.
Background noise level	The background level is the baseline sound level in an area or the 'urban hum'. It is roughly the level of the quietest periods during breaks between intermittent sounds such as passing cars or birds. It is usually measured using L90.
Ambient noise level	The ambient noise level is the existing sound level in an area, usually measured using the equivalent continuous sound level (Leq). It includes the background sound and intermittent sounds.
L10 (period)	This is the sound level that is exceeded for 10% of the measurement period. This is commonly accepted as the typical maximum noise levels.
L90 (period)	This is the sound level that is exceeded for 90% of the measurement period. This is commonly accepted as the background noise level or typical minimum noise level.
LAeq (period)	This is the average noise level over a measurement period, adjusted to reflect how the human ear hears sound. It represents the total sound energy over that time and expresses it as one continuous average level.

Principles and approach

Objectives of the sound plan

- To protect reasonable neighbourhood and residential amenity while supporting businesses that provide live music and entertainment
- To provide operational certainty and protect venues from unreasonable noise complaints
- To ensure the management of special entertainment precincts recognises and responds to their unique context and future desired character
- To have sound criteria which are measurable and easily applicable for regulators

Approach and key principles

The sound plan establishes fixed sound levels for different neighbourhoods, recognising that background sound levels vary across the local area. It creates 4 sound category areas (SCA1–SCA4), from the loudest to the quietest, each with its own noise criteria.

Sound limits change across 3 daily time periods:

- day and evening (7am to 10pm) – more flexible to support entertainment
- early night (10pm to midnight) – a transition period
- late night (midnight to 7am) – stricter sound criteria to protect residential amenity.

Sound levels are measured outside, at the façade of the receiving property. External criteria also apply to non-residential receivers, with limits that are less strict than for homes.

Internal sound criteria are only used when external measurements don't reflect how sound is transmitted, such as when a venue and receiver share walls or are in the same building.

Guidance for managing entertainment sound

The City of Sydney local area is a lively mixed-use place. Our approach to special entertainment precincts aims to balance more live music, activity and nightlife with the reasonable expectation of residential amenity.

This plan provides sound level limits for compliance and regulation. It also sets expectations to proactively manage sound. Everyone has a role to play in keeping this balance.

Venues

Venues in special entertainment precincts are expected to take proactive and reasonable steps to manage entertainment sound and minimise impacts on nearby residents. This includes:

- maintaining well configured sound systems
- keeping doors and windows closed after 10pm where possible
- adding acoustic seals to doors and windows
- monitoring sound levels
- actively managing patron behaviour at entry and exit points
- setting up outdoor dining so people sitting together are close and tables are small to help reduce sound levels
- adjusting performance or operational settings when issues arise
- responding promptly and constructively to concerns raised.

Venues that already have plans of management, development consents or acoustic reports with recommended operating conditions, such as using sound limiters and closing windows after midnight, are expected to continue using these measures to minimise disturbance.

The best way to manage sound is at the source. If you're renovating, consider acoustic upgrades that support long-term compliance, improve the experience for your customers and help maintain a lively, well-managed nightlife environment.

New or significantly changed venues must manage sound in line with section 3.18 of the Sydney DCP 2012.

If you're opening a new venue or relocating, it helps to think about this sound plan early when choosing a site. Picking the right location can reduce how much acoustic treatment you need and may allow more entertainment activity. Suitable sites for more intense entertainment activity are usually:

- further away or well shielded from homes
- in louder sound category areas (SCA1 and SCA2) and away from quieter areas (SCA3 and SCA4)
- have entry and exit points on main streets rather than residential streets

- close to good public transport
- in buildings with strong acoustic performance
- located in basement spaces.

Residents affected by entertainment sound

In a busy global city, it's normal to hear some entertainment activity. Our sound management approach changes with the time of day:

- 7am to 10pm – flexible to support live music and activity
- 10pm to midnight – a transition period
- after midnight – stricter setting to protect residential amenity.

Residents are also expected to take reasonable steps to manage everyday entertainment sound in their homes. Practical options include:

- using a fan, air conditioner or white/pink noise device to help mask sound
- adding acoustic seals to doors and windows
- closing windows when it makes sense to do so.

When renovating, residents are encouraged to consider the acoustic performance of windows, façades and other building elements to improve long-term sound insulation.

New homes built in and near special entertainment precincts may need sound-attenuating measures in line with section 3.18 of the Sydney DCP 2012.

If you're seriously or unreasonably disturbed by entertainment sound:

- get more information about making a noise complaint for a **licensed venue** by visiting the Liquor & Gaming NSW website
- get more information about making a noise complaint for an **unlicensed venue** by visiting the City of Sydney website.

[Exhibition note: Links will be added when this document is finalised]

Sound category areas

Four sound category areas (SCAs) are defined (see figure 6) based on the existing noise levels in the area. These include special entertainment precincts and a buffer area.

The categories range from SCA1 for the loudest areas to SCA4 for the quietest areas. Each SCA has its own sound criteria.

The criteria that apply are based on the SCA of the receiver, not the SCA of the venue creating the sound.

If a receiver is in a grey area (other areas in the map below), a line should be drawn between the noise source and the receiver. The SCA closest to the receiver along that line would apply.

While a buffer area is mapped, this plan only applies to venues located within the special entertainment precinct boundaries.

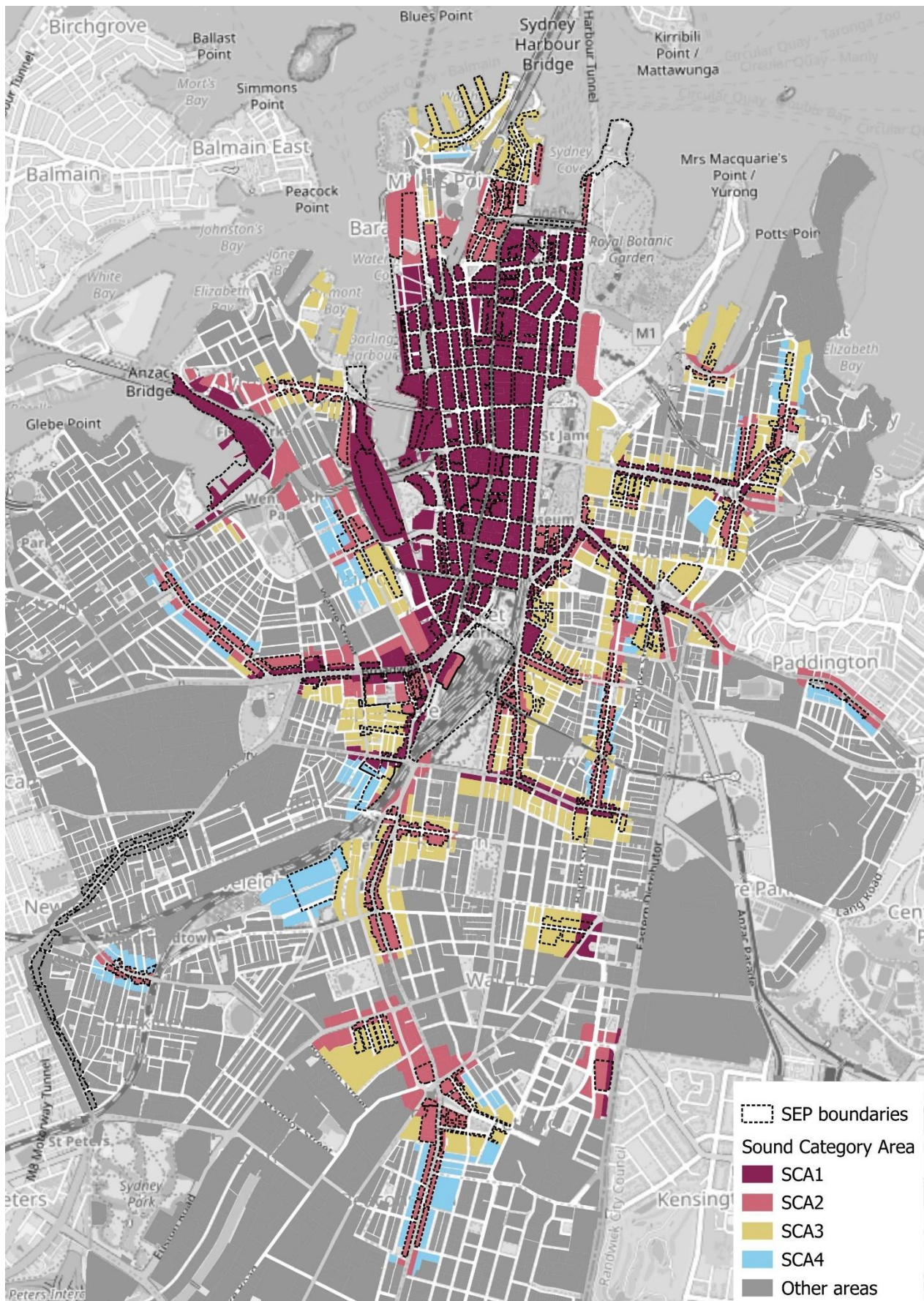


Figure 6. Sound category areas

Sound criteria for venues

The sound criteria that apply depend on the location and type of receiver.

Entertainment sound from venues in a special entertainment precinct must not exceed the sound criteria in figures 7 or 8, as measured at a residential receiver.

The criteria apply to the total sound emission from patrons and music (amplified and unamplified) both inside the venue and within designated outdoor areas.

The criteria apply to the cumulative level of all venues. In areas with multiple venues, the contribution from each individual venue should be at least 5dB below the values in figures 7 or 8.

The sound criteria do not apply to outdoor patron sound during the day/evening period when this is the only source of sound. This includes patron sound from outdoor dining on public streets, and from outdoor areas within a premises. The criteria do apply to outdoor patron sound during early night and late night times.

If the assessment location is not accessible for measurement, or if the entertainment level at the assessment location cannot be measured due to extraneous noise, the sound level can be calculated by a qualified acoustic consultant based on measurements at the venue and at interim locations.

If the receiver is not residential, entertainment sound from venues must not exceed the sound criteria in figures 7 or 8 with the adjustments in figure 9. If the adjustment results in a value which exceeds 75dB, then 75dB should be used as the applicable criteria. In areas with multiple venues, the minus 5dB adjustment should be made before the adjustments in figure 9.

Measured externally

The criteria in figure 7 apply 1m outside the most-affected window of a habitable room at 1.5m above the floor. Habitable rooms include living rooms and bedrooms, but not garages, kitchens, bathrooms or hallways.

The criteria are based on sound levels without façade reflection, so a –2.5dB façade correction should be applied to any direct measurement before comparing it with the criteria.

Figure 7. Sound criteria – measured externally

Cumulative levels, L_{Aeq} for dBA and L_{Zeq} for octave bands

Sound category area (SCA)	Days of the week	Day/Evening (7am–10pm)					Early night (10pm–midnight)					Late night (midnight–7am)				
		Octave bands – dB					Octave bands – dB					Octave bands – dB				
		dBA	31.5	63	125	250	dBA	31.5	63	125	250	dBA	31.5	63	125	250
SCA1	Sun 6pm–Thu 6pm	68	67	69	69	69	60	63	64	64	64	50	59*	52	52	50
	Thu 6pm–Sun 6pm	68 70	67 68	69 70	69 70	69 71	63	65	67	67	67	50 52	59*	52 54	52 54	50 52
SCA2	Any day Sun 6pm–Thu 6pm	63	61	61	61	61	55	56*	55	55	56	45	56*	46*	44	44

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	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	<u>65</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>56*</u>	<u>46*</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>44</u>
SCA3	Any day Sun 6pm– Thu 6pm	58	60	60	59	58	50	56*	52	52	51	37 40	56*	44 [±] 46*	35 43*	32 38*
	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	<u>60</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>56*</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>56*</u>	<u>46*</u>	<u>43*</u>	<u>38*</u>
SCA4	Any day Sun 6pm– Thu 6pm	53	56	56	53	53	45	56*	49	46	46	32 35	56*	44 [±] 46*	30 [±] 43*	25 31
	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	<u>55</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>56*</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>56*</u>	<u>46*</u>	<u>43*</u>	<u>31</u>

* If these levels are exceeded, an optional third octave band assessment may be carried out to demonstrate compliance (see figure 10).

Sound criteria where internal measurement is required

Internal sound criteria in figure 8 are only used when the external criteria aren't suitable. This includes situations where the receiver is structurally connected to the venue (for example, sharing a wall or located in the same building) and noise travels mainly through internal structures

The internal criteria apply inside the most-affected area of a habitable room of the receiver, 1.5m above the floor and at least 1m from any surfaces.

Windows and doors should be closed for internal criteria assessment.

Figure 8. Sound criteria – measured internally

Cumulative levels, L_{Aeq} for dBA and L_{Zeq} for octave bands

Sound category area (SCA)	Days of the week	Day/Evening (7am–10pm)					Early night (10pm–midnight)					Late night (midnight–7am)				
		Octave bands – dB					Octave bands dB					Octave bands – dB				
		dBA	31.5	63	125	250	dBA	31.5	63	125	250	dBA	31.5	63	125	250
SCA1	Sun 6pm–Thu 6pm	53	62	60	57	55	45	58	55	52	50	35	54*	43	40	36
	Thu 6pm–Sun 6pm	<u>53</u> <u>55</u>	<u>62</u> <u>63</u>	<u>60</u> <u>61</u>	<u>57</u> <u>58</u>	<u>55</u> <u>57</u>	48	60	58	55	53	35	54*	43	40	36

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SCA2	Any day Sun 6pm– Thu 6pm	48	56	52	49	47	40	51*	46	43	42	30	51*	37*	32	30
	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	50	57	53	50	49	43	53	49	46	45	30	51*	37*	32	30
SCA3	Any day Sun 6pm– Thu 6pm	43	55	51	47	44	35	51*	43	40	37	22 25	51* 51*	32* 37*	23 31*	18 24
	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	45	56	52	48	46	38	51*	46	43	40	25	51*	37*	31*	24
SCA4	Any day Sun 6pm– Thu 6pm	38	51	47	41	39	30	51*	40	34	32	17 20	51* 51*	32* 37*	18* 31*	12 17
	Thu 6pm– Sun 6pm	40	52	48	42	41	33	51*	43	37	35	20	51*	37*	31*	17

*If these levels are exceeded, an optional third octave band assessment may be carried out to demonstrate compliance (see figure 11).

Figure 9. Non-residential receiver sound criteria adjustments

Receiver type	Basis	Adjustment (relevant to basis)				
		Broadb and L _{Aeq} criteria	Octave band L _{Zeq} criteria			
			dBA	31.5 Hz	63 Hz	125 Hz
Tourist and visitor accommodation (including hotels, motels, backpackers' accommodation and serviced apartments)	Sound criteria the relevant time period and SCA	+ 8dB	+ 4dB	+ 6dB	+ 6dB	+ 8dB
Hospitals (as measured from a ward or sleeping room)	Sound criteria the relevant time period and SCA	+ 5dB	+ 2dB	+ 3dB	+ 3dB	+ 5dB
Schools (as measured from a classroom)	Only the day/evening criteria in the relevant SCA	+ 0dB	+ 0dB	+ 0dB	+ 0dB	+ 0dB

Receiver type		Adjustment (relevant to basis)				
		Broadb and L _{Aeq} criteria	Octave band L _{Ze} criteria			
			dBA	31.5 Hz	63 Hz	125 Hz
Basis						
Commercial premises (including business, office and retail premises)	Only the day/evening criteria in the relevant SCA	+ 10dB	+ 5dB	+ 7dB	+ 7dB	+ 10dB
Places of public worship, educational establishment, and health services facilities and other land uses (other than those stated above)	Only the day/evening criteria in the relevant SCA	+ 5dB	+ 2dB	+ 3dB	+ 3dB	+ 5dB

Optional third octave band assessments

Figure 10. Optional third octave band assessment criteria external

SCA	25 Hz	31.5 Hz	40 Hz	50 Hz	63 Hz	80 Hz	100 Hz	125 Hz	160 Hz
SCA1	73	65	57	-	-	-	-	-	-
SCA2-4	70	62	54	49	45	44	<u>44</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>41</u>
SCA3-4	70	62	54	49	44	39	36	31	28

Figure 11. Optional third octave band assessment criteria internal

Time period	25 Hz	31.5 Hz	40 Hz	50 Hz	63 Hz	80 Hz	100 Hz	125 Hz	160 Hz
SCA1	69	60	51	-	-	-	-	-	-
SCA2-4	66	57	48	41	36	34	<u>32</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>28</u>
SCA3-4	66	57	48	41	35	29	24	19	15

Compliance measurement guidance

Compliance measurements should be conducted at a time and day considered to be representative of the typical worst-case impact. A valid measurement should be at least 15 minutes long, with allowance for post-processing to exclude data samples affected by extraneous noise. This may result in reporting a shorter duration L_{eq} for measured venue sound.

Measuring venue sound output in real conditions can be difficult because of other sources of sound. This is especially true at night, when the criteria focus on protecting residents' acoustic amenity. In most cases, an experienced acoustic specialist will need to establish methods to estimate the venue's noise contribution.

An L_{eq} criterion is used because it's consistent and can be used in calculations, such as adding or subtracting noise sources. At the same time, existing ambient noise – such as traffic, rail, ferries, aircraft and mechanical plant – can influence the readings at the receiver.

Measurements taken at the receiver will often need to be supported by further measurements closer to the venue. These can be used to develop transfer functions that help identify how much of the sound at the receiver is coming from the venue.

A sound level meter will usually record L_1 , L_{10} and L_{eq} . Looking at L_1 and L_{10} can help distinguish steady, music-type sounds from other background noise. An experienced operator will

also note which sounds are dominant during the measurement and which ones are likely to influence the Leq reading.

In the case where external criteria apply but direct measurement is not possible at the assessment location, the calculation of sound level at the assessment location can be done by measuring at the venue and/or interim locations and calculating sound reduction of the airborne propagation (e.g., distance, shielding, air absorption).

Sound criteria for build and construction

The City of Sydney's planning controls require new development to manage entertainment sound effectively.

- **New residential development** in certain locations must be designed and built to protect new residents from entertainment sound in the neighbourhood. This helps reduce the risk of sound complaints that could affect long-established venues, while also protecting the amenity of new residents.
- **New and substantially changed venues** must meet design and construction standards that provide reasonable sound attenuation for existing residents. These requirements only apply when a venue proposes changes that would significantly increase its sound emissions, as defined by specific activities and thresholds in the planning controls.

The required sound criteria are broadly aligned with this sound plan. This means new developments will be designed to suit the sound conditions of the area. Over time, these acoustic improvements will support a well-managed, sustainable nightlife that balances activity with residential amenity.

See section 3.18 of the Sydney DCP 2012.

Governance and engagement

Special entertainment precincts working group

Nightlife and Creative Industries Advisory Panel

The City of Sydney's Nightlife and Creative Industries Advisory Panel acts as the special entertainment precincts working group. It supports the establishment, day-to-day operation and ongoing monitoring of these precincts.

The panel includes key nightlife partners, such as industry associations, cultural institutions, creatives, live music and performance venues, small bars and festivals. They provide high-level, independent expert advice to support a strong, inclusive and culture-led nightlife.

The panel is an advisory body only. It does not have regulatory powers and cannot commit the City of Sydney to actions or change planning controls. Its role includes monitoring potential issues, advising on communication with residents and businesses, and recommending practical adjustments to help the precincts achieve their intended outcomes.

The panel meets 3 times a year, with local police and relevant NSW Government representatives invited when needed.

Where to get help

Our business, creative and nightlife concierge

This service is a dedicated City of Sydney team that provides tailored guidance for businesses and creatives. The team helps people to navigate our systems and processes, including planning approvals, licensing, venue hire and funding applications.

The concierge is a quick and effective way to hear from businesses and the community. It helps us track feedback, identify new trends and issues, and address recurring challenges, including barriers caused by systems or policies.

Regular updates on the special entertainment precincts are available on the City of Sydney website [Exhibition note: Link will be added when this document is finalised]

Contact the concierge team on 02 9265 9909 or at businesscreativenightlifeconcierge@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Monitoring and evaluation

We will regularly monitor and evaluate the success of special entertainment precincts.

Reporting and data collection

We'll monitor changes in special entertainment precincts at least each year using a range of existing data sources, including:

- our floor space and employment survey, pedestrian counts, planning information and health and building compliance reports
- data from external agencies such as the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner, Transport for NSW and Liquor & Gaming NSW.

We may also survey businesses and the community from time to time.

Data sources and methods may be updated over time to ensure the approach stays effective.

Objectives and outcomes

The objectives and outcomes are used to assess the performance of special entertainment precincts over time.

Objective 1: Enable businesses to invest in and offer more live music, culture, entertainment and performance as part of their regular activities

Desired outcomes

- Businesses stay open later
- Venues host more live music, performances or events
- More employment opportunities for performing artists

Objective 2: Foster vibrant, inclusive, mixed-use neighbourhoods that support local community amenity

Desired outcomes

- Local communities can access a range of businesses and services, day and night
- Premises comply with sound limits

Objective 3: Improve quality, safety and diversity of the late-night offering

Desired outcomes

- Nightlife reflects the local character of the precinct
- Diverse business types trade later
- Everyone safely enjoys nightlife in the city

Objective 4: Enhance economic outcomes, supporting businesses to thrive

Desired outcomes

- Improved economic activity in special entertainment precincts
- More visitors in special entertainment precincts

Objective 5: Streamline the process for businesses and the City of Sydney to make it easier and more affordable to operate late night trading premises

Desired outcomes

- Fewer development applications for late night trading
- Less regulatory complexity, administrative effort and costs for businesses

Suspending or revoking special entertainment precinct status

The City of Sydney recognises that special entertainment precincts play an important role in supporting a safe, vibrant and diverse night-time economy. Suspending or revoking a precinct is a **serious and exceptional action** and will only occur when all reasonable options to resolve issues have been tried.

Under the NSW Special Entertainment Precinct Guidelines, both the City of Sydney and Minister for Planning and Public Spaces must follow mandatory procedures before a precinct can be suspended or revoked.

This section explains when we may consider taking this action, and the evidence and governance requirements that must be met.

When suspension or revocation may be considered

We'll only consider suspension or revocation when significant, ongoing issues cannot be resolved through usual compliance approaches. These may include education, engagement, negotiated agreements, improvement actions or regulatory enforcement. Action will only be considered when issues pose a long-term risk to public amenity, safety or the effective functioning of the special entertainment precinct.

Suspension or revocation may also be considered when there is confirmed evidence – provided by the City of Sydney, Liquor & Gaming NSW or NSW Police – showing repeated non-compliance with the precinct management plan or other legislation. It may also follow a recommendation from an inquiry carried out by the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner.

Thresholds for suspension or revocation

A special entertainment precinct can only be suspended or revoked through a formal Council resolution, and only when all the following thresholds are met:

- **Cumulative amenity impacts** – Businesses in the precinct are collectively causing unreasonable disturbance that cannot be managed through standard compliance actions.

- **Sustained anti-social behaviour** – There are ongoing, elevated levels of anti-social behaviour or public safety incidents over a significant period, supported by verified reports and shared agency data.
- **Exhaustion of compliance pathways** – All reasonable compliance measures – such as targeted enforcement, monitoring and collaborative work with precinct operators – have been tried, and suspension or revocation is the only remaining option to protect community safety and amenity.

Requirements for any suspension or revocation

Any decision to suspend or revoke a special entertainment precinct must:

- **be supported by verified evidence** from the City of Sydney, Liquor & Gaming NSW, NSW Police and other agencies, showing a clear, ongoing failure to meet precinct expectations
- **reflect a coordinated, multi-agency position** agreed in principle by the working group, NSW Police, City of Sydney staff and the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner
- **be a genuine last resort**, taken only after clear attempts to resolve issues with businesses, residents and partners.

Council may also choose to revoke a special entertainment precinct if a strategic review finds the precinct model is no longer suitable or effective for the area. For example, where land-use patterns have changed, community needs have shifted, or another planning mechanism would better support local amenity and night-time activity.

Our approach to compliance

The City of Sydney works to balance its legislative responsibilities, strategic priorities and available resources when making regulatory decisions. Our goal is to achieve the best outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors, while supporting a vibrant, safe and sustainable city.

To promote transparency and provide clear guidance, we provide relevant resources on our website, including:

- our [compliance policy](#)
- information about our [complaints management approach](#)
- operational noise management plans for venues in identified sound catchment areas
- publicly available information on premises and venue addresses in special entertainment precincts, including maps of relevant areas.

Who to contact for assistance

Type of complaint	City of Sydney	Liquor & Gaming NSW	NSW Police	NSW Police Marine Area Command
Feedback about special entertainment precincts	✓			
Entertainment sound from a licensed premises		✓		
Entertainment sound from an unlicensed premises	✓			

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Type of complaint	City of Sydney	Liquor & Gaming NSW	NSW Police	NSW Police Marine Area Command
Entertainment sound from a marine vessel				✓
Environmental noise such as construction noise or rubbish collection	✓			
Crime or anti-social behaviour that requires immediate attention			✓	
General non-compliance of a business, including trading hours and patron capacity	✓			

