

Item 5.

Post Exhibition - Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Items (Stage 1) - Sydney Local Environmental Plan 2012 Amendment

File No: X091578

Summary

The City's Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Social and Cultural Place Strategy included an action to investigate heritage listing places within the Oxford Street precinct that have historic and contemporary connections to the LGBTIQA+ community.

After undertaking a heritage study, Council resolved in December 2024 to publicly exhibit a planning proposal to heritage list the following sites for their significance to the LGBTIQA+ community:

- **Universal, 85-91 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst:** The buildings are part of the important focus of LGBTIQA+ commercial and social activity in Oxford Street from the end of the 1970s onwards, having operated as a LGBTIQA+ nightclub almost continuously since 1978.
- **Palms, 124 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst (part of 124-128 Oxford Street):** Palms, in the basement of the building became a gay nightclub in the late 1970s, which it remains to the present day.
- **The Oxford Hotel, 134 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst:** The Oxford Hotel is linked to the development of Sydney's rock music scene during the second half of the 1970s and with Sydney's gay community, having traded to the gay male community continuously since 1982.

The Planning Proposal was exhibited between 1 August and 29 August 2025. We received 10 submissions, largely in favour of heritage listing the 3 properties.

Most submissions received (8 submissions or 80%) support heritage listing the 3 buildings. Respondents generally supported the recognition of the importance of these sites to the LGBTIQA+ community.

One submission opposed heritage listing of the 3 sites as the respondent felt that this was not inclusive of the broader community. The City is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable city for all. Recognising sites of significance to the LGBTIQA+ community is a vital part of this commitment. Oxford Street has long been a cultural and social hub for LGBTIQA+ people, and the proposed heritage listings reflect decades of community connection, resilience, and contribution. Far from being exclusive, this action celebrates diversity and acknowledges the lived experiences of one of Sydney's most vibrant communities, in line with Council's broader goals of inclusion, equity, and social cohesion.

Another submission expressed concern about the "museumification of the city" and the potential impact that this listing may have on housing supply or substantial changes to the sites in the future. The planning controls for Oxford Street were updated in 2022, which included additional height and density to encourage cultural and creative uses while respecting the heritage character of the street. Residential development is still permitted under the base height and floor space controls. The development control plan included guidance for developing heritage buildings along Oxford Street. The proposed listings do not remove the opportunity to sympathetically develop the sites under the controls.

No changes are proposed to the listings following the consideration of submissions. This report recommends Council approve the planning proposal to list the 3 sites as heritage items. If approved, Council is designated the local plan making authority and can proceed to finalisation. The amendment to the Sydney LEP 2012 will come into effect when it is published on the NSW Legislation website.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the submissions received during the public exhibition of the Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Heritage Items (Stage 1), shown at Attachment F to the subject report;
- (B) Council approve the Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Heritage Items (Stage 1), shown at Attachment A to the subject report to be made as a local environmental plan under section 3.36 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make any minor variations to the Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Heritage Items (Stage 1) shown at Attachment A to the subject report, to correct any drafting errors prior to finalisation of the local environmental plan.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Planning Proposal - Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Items (Stage 1)
- Attachment B.** Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Assessment Report (TKD Architects)
- Attachment C.** Revised Inventory Sheet - 134 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst - Oxford Hotel
- Attachment D.** Revised Inventory Sheet - 124 (part of 124-128 Oxford Street) Oxford Street, Darlinghurst - Palms Hotel
- Attachment E.** Revised Inventory Sheet - 85-91 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst – Universal
- Attachment F.** Engagement Report - Oxford Street LGBTIQA+ Heritage Items (Stage 1)
- Attachment G.** Gateway Determination
- Attachment H.** Council and Central Sydney Planning Committee Resolutions

Background

1. In 2022, a review of the planning controls applying to Oxford Street was implemented to facilitate the growth of the cultural and creative sectors, protect heritage and character and support the day and night-time economies for the local community and visitors.
2. Community consultation indicated that people value the strong connection between Oxford Street and LGBTIQ+ communities and wanted to see its social and cultural heritage recognised and maintained. This led to the development of the Oxford Street LGBTIQ+ Social and Cultural Place Strategy with five priority areas. Priority 1 of this strategy focused on recognising historic LGBTIQ+ places and spaces.
3. The City of Sydney (the City) engaged TKD Architects in 2022 to complete a heritage study investigating sites within the Oxford Street precinct. Their study focussed on places with historic and contemporary connections to the LGBTIQ+ community.
4. Based on the Study, a planning proposal reported to Council in December 2024 proposed heritage listing the following sites for their significance to the LGBTIQ+ community:
 - Universal, 85-91 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst
 - Palms, 124 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst (part of 124-128 Oxford Street)
 - The Oxford Hotel, 134 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst

We consulted on a proposal to heritage list the 3 buildings

5. In December 2024, the Central Sydney Planning Committee and Council resolved to seek a Gateway Determination and exhibit the planning proposal to heritage list the 3 buildings. The background and pre-exhibition report can be found here: <https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=4230&Ver=4>
6. City staff submitted a request for Gateway on 28 January 2025. The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure approved public consultation for the planning proposal in its Gateway Determination (Attachment G), issued on 2 May 2025. It also authorised the Council to exercise the functions of the local plan-making authority.
7. The planning proposal to heritage list the 3 buildings was placed on public exhibition from 1 August and 29 August 2025. A total of 260 letters were distributed to notify the owners and occupiers. The project was included in the August editions of the Sydney Your Say e-newsletter and distributed to 9,941 subscribers. The Sydney Your Say page was visited 625 times with 104 downloads of the exhibition documents. An additional 22 stakeholders were emailed on 25 August 2025.
8. We received a total of 10 submissions via online survey (7) and email (3). Submissions were largely supportive of the proposal. The engagement report, including a summary of submissions, can be found at Attachment F.
9. Most submissions were by community members.

10. All building owners were contacted regarding the consultation and were aware the consultation was occurring. Of the building owners, only one provided a submission, through their planning consultant.

Analysis of submissions

11. We received a total of 10 submissions. Of these, 7 were in favour of the proposal, 2 expressed concerns and one was opposed to the proposal.

Seven submissions (70%) support the proposal

12. Respondents highlighted the importance of acknowledging the history and role these venues played in the social, cultural and political life of Oxford Street and equality movement, and that these places continue to be important places for the LGBTIQ+ community.

One submission expressed concern about the effect on development

13. One respondent noted that heritage listing may mean the subject sites could not be used for high density housing in the future. The respondent also noted that heritage listing may prevent the site from being transformed into something greater in the future.
14. In April 2022, Council introduced new planning controls for Oxford Street which provide an alternative set of height and floor space ratio controls as an incentive for cultural, creative and business uses. Residential development is permissible in the land use zones of the precinct and can be undertaken under the existing planning controls, without the incentive height and FSR increase. The controls enable development of heritage items and contributory buildings with specific guidance included in the development control plan. The proposed listings do not remove the opportunity to sympathetically develop the sites under the controls.

A submission sought support for a digital billboard on 134 Oxford Street

15. The submission for The Oxford Hotel at 134 Oxford Street was made by a planning consultant on behalf of the building owners. It incorporated a very brief heritage statement prepared by their planning consultant, questioning some of the conclusions of the detailed TKD Architects heritage assessment. Their heritage statement is not considered independent and the City considers that the item still meets the threshold for local heritage listing as identified in our heritage assessment.
16. Despite the heritage statement, the property owner's submission explicitly proposes support for the proposed individual heritage listing on the basis that in principle support is provided for retention of an existing sky sign (billboard) and its proposed future illumination/animation.
17. A development application was lodged for the removal of the existing static sky sign and installation of a new internally illuminated digital advertising sign in October 2025. The development application is under assessment. Approval for a previous application to convert this sign to digital was refused in 2015 and the refusal upheld in the Land and Environment Court (LEC) LEC for both heritage and traffic reasons.
18. This planning proposal to list the site as a heritage item was prepared and exhibited prior to the lodgement of the development application for the sign. The Oxford Hotel is already a contributory building in a heritage conservation area and an exhibited planning proposal is a matter for consideration.

19. Council is not the consent authority for the development application and cannot provide support for the development as requested in the submission.

One submission opposed the proposal

20. Only one submission was in opposition of the proposal.
21. The principal objection of this submission relates to the heritage listings as expressions of sexual diversity.
22. The City is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable city for all. Recognising and preserving sites of significance to the LGBTIQA+ community is a vital part of this commitment. Oxford Street has long been a cultural and social hub for LGBTIQA+ people, and the proposed heritage listings reflect decades of community connection, resilience, and contribution. Far from being exclusive, this action celebrates diversity and acknowledges the lived experiences of one of Sydney's most vibrant communities, in line with Council's broader goals of inclusion, equity, and social cohesion.

Amendments are proposed to heritage management recommendations

23. At its meeting in December 2024, Council resolved that the Chief Executive Officer investigate the local heritage listing of 3 additional sites of LGBTIQA+ historical significance: 273 Crown Street, Surry Hills (Former Ruby Reds), 40-42 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst (Former Taxi Club) and 207 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst (The Bookshop). Following a detailed heritage assessment by TKD Architects, a planning proposal reported to Council in September 2025 regarding these sites (Stage 2). Council resolved to approve the planning proposal for submission to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure with a request for a gateway determination, which is underway.
24. In considering the Stage 2 listings Council asked questions in relation to the impact of the listings on future development, interpretation of social significance, planning controls and development potential as well as interpretation examples of social significance. The City responded to these questions and in addition provide further information by way of a Relevant To memo to Council which can be accessed here: <https://meetings.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/documents/b16693/Information%20Relevant%20To%20Item%2010.3%20-%20Public%20Exhibition%20-%20Planning%20Proposal%20-%20Oxford%20Street%20LGBTIQA%20H.pdf?T=9>
25. No amendments are proposed to the Stage 1 listings in response to public submissions however amended guidelines for the recommended management of the Stage 1 heritage listings has been incorporated into the final inventory sheet to better facilitate their ongoing management. This reflects the discussions with Council when considering the Stage 2 listings. These revised inventory sheets can be found at Attachments C, D and E.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

26. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. The proposal is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - the acknowledgement of the importance of the Oxford Street precinct to the LGBTIQ+ will contribute to the City's cultural and creative life through the recognition and promotion of the area's historical significance and value to the community.

Risks

27. There is a risk some stakeholders may disagree with the proposed heritage listings. However, proceeding with the proposal is within the City's risk appetite for its reputation and image. We aim to strike a balance between achieving our strategic objectives, conserving and promoting culture and heritage, and protecting our reputation. The project aligns with our appetite to tolerate minor complaints relating to action which has long-term community benefit and aligns with agreed actions in Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision.
28. Progressing the proposal in its current form is within the City's risk tolerance and appetite. The amended proposal strikes the right balance between achieving our strategic objectives and preserving and promoting culture and heritage.

Relevant Legislation

29. Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

30. The Gateway Determination specified that the amendment to the Sydney LEP 2012 is to be completed by 14 November 2025. An extension to this timeframe has been requested.
31. The Gateway Determination authorises Council to exercise its delegation and liaise directly with Parliamentary Counsel to draft and make the local environmental plan. If the planning proposal is approved by the Central Sydney Planning Committee and Council, the City will commence this process. Once the process is complete and the plan is made, the amendment to the Sydney LEP 2012 will come into effect when published on the NSW Legislation website.

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