

Project Scope - Paddington Town Hall Major Renewal

File No: X106770

Summary

This report outlines the proposed scope of works for the renewal and upgrade of Paddington Town Hall.

Paddington Town Hall is the City's second largest Town Hall after Sydney Town Hall. The building is state heritage listed for its social significance and as a landmark within the Victorian Free Classical Architectural style.

Originally built in 1891, the building has undergone progressive expansion and changes in use in response to changing community and social needs. The last major renewal and upgrade works were completed in the 1990s.

Whole of building renewal and upgrade works are now required due to the age and condition of building services and fit-out and low utilisation of key spaces. The project scope has been informed by a detailed review of building condition and current management / utilisation of the spaces along with community feedback and includes:

- (a) Heritage restoration works, and renewal and upgrade of building services, interior finishes and fit-out.
- (b) Returning the former Chauvel Cinema tenancy (currently vacant) to its original form as a large hall with flat floor / high ceilings / natural light to be managed as a venue-for-hire space available for a range of community and cultural uses, including film screenings.
- (c) Returning the former Oatley Road accommodation grant program tenancy (currently vacant) to its original form as a large hall with flat floor / high ceilings / natural light to be a venue-for-hire space available for a range of community and cultural uses including rehearsals.
- (d) Consolidating the Oxford Street Accommodation grant program tenancy (currently leased to Eastside Radio) with the adjoining Paddington Library.
- (e) Creating a new shared foyer with passenger and goods lifts, new accessible toilet facilities and shared back of house facilities (kitchen, storage etc).

The Paddington Town Hall renewal and upgrade project will deliver a revitalised building enabling the next 50 years of community and cultural uses for Paddington.

This report outlines the scope of works and recommended use of spaces at Paddington Town Hall and seeks Council endorsement to proceed to required planning approvals, detailed design, documentation and construction of the works.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council endorse the recommended project scope and use of spaces at Paddington Town Hall as described in the subject report for progression to required planning approvals, detailed design and documentation, and construction of works
- (B) Council endorse in principle the relocation of Eastside Radio to the lower ground floor accommodation grant program tenancy at 50-52 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross, subject to the terms as described in the subject report
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate and enter into any agreements with Woollahra Municipal Council and Eastside Radio Station that are required to give effect to (A) and (B) above.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Engagement report - Paddington Town Hall renewal: phase 1
- Attachment B.** Summary of recommended scope of works

Background

1. Originally built in 1891, Paddington Town Hall is a State Heritage listed building at the corner of Oxford Street and Oatley Road, Paddington. It is the City's second-largest town hall after Sydney Town Hall.
2. The building has undergone progressive expansion and changes in use and management in response to changing community needs and Local Government Area boundary re-alignments.
3. The building was originally built in 2 stages with the first stage of works completed in 1891, delivering a 2-storey building to Oxford Street with municipal uses on the ground floor and a major hall (Stapleton Hall) on Level 1.
4. In 1923 the building was expanded with the construction of a 2-storey extension to Oatley Road delivering 2 new hall spaces (Hall 1 and Hall 2) and a shared foyer. The use of the halls in the Oatley Road extension continued as community use through until the 1950s when the ground floor hall was converted into a library. In the 1970s the level 1 hall was converted to a cinema.
5. The building was last substantially renewed in the 1990s when Gazzard Sheldon Architects were commissioned by The Council of South Sydney. The works extended to all building areas and included the relocation of the library to its current location on Oxford Street, construction of a second cinema space and creation of 2 separate tenancies which have been operated as Accommodation Grant Program tenancies for a number of years.
6. Current spaces / uses and management models are as follows:
 - (a) Paddington Library - jointly operated by City of Sydney and Woollahra Council
 - (b) Stapleton Hall - major venue for hire operated by the City
 - (c) Chauvel Cinema (Former Hall 2) - previously leased to commercial operator, currently vacant
 - (d) Oatley Road accommodation grant program (AGP) Tenancy (Former Hall 1) - previously leased to a creative media tenant, currently vacant
 - (e) Oxford Street accommodation grant program Tenancy (87 sqm) - currently leased to Eastside Radio Station.
7. The City has allocated funding in its Long-Term Financial Plan to deliver the next stage of renewal and upgrade works at Paddington Town Hall to enable the next 50 years of operation of this valued community facility.
8. A head design consultant (NMBW Architecture Studio) has been engaged and concept design completed, clarifying the scope of works and the required budget.

Recommended Use of Community / Cultural Spaces

9. A detailed review of building condition and current management / utilisation of the spaces along with community feedback was completed to inform the development of the project.
10. This review identified the following key issues:
 - (a) Stapleton Hall - Utilisation of this space has been limited due to access constraints (single lift) and conflicts between uses, in particular complaints regarding noise spill / disruption to the former Chauvel Cinema.
 - (b) Oxford Street accommodation grant program Tenancy - The tenancy space is highly constrained and split over 2 levels with no accessible path of travel to the lower ground floor space. Due to the limited size of the existing tenancy provision of an accessible path of travel is not feasible.
 - (c) Chauvel Cinema Commercial Tenancy - Major renewal and upgrade works are required to the space and demand for cinema space and operational viability (commercial or City / creative sector led) is challenging due to:
 - (i) Constraints of the existing spaces and limited number of seats / screens
 - (ii) Availability of nearby facilities with multiple screens including Hoyts Moore Park (9 screens), Palace Cinemas Moore Park (4 screens) and Event Cinemas Bondi Junction (11 screens)
 - (iii) The opening of the 339-seat Sydney Cinémathèque at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in March 2026 with a focus on 'curated cinema'.
 - (d) Oatley Road accommodation grant program Tenancy - Major renewal and compliance upgrade works are required to the space and the current fit-out with multiple small rooms / mezzanine structures restricting the use of the space.
11. At the conclusion of the review, it is recommended to make a number of changes to current use of spaces within Paddington Town Hall, including:
 - (a) Returning the former Chauvel Cinema tenancy (currently vacant) to its original form as a large hall with flat floor / high ceilings / natural light. The hall is proposed to be a venue-for-hire available for a range of community and cultural uses, including film screenings.
 - (b) Returning the former Oatley Road accommodation grant program tenancy (currently vacant) to its original form as a large hall with flat floor / high ceilings / natural light. The hall is proposed to be a venue-for-hire available for a range of community and cultural uses including rehearsals.
 - (c) Consolidating the Oxford Street Accommodation grant program tenancy (currently leased to Eastside Radio) with the adjoining Paddington Library.
 - (d) Creating a new shared foyer with passenger and goods lifts, new accessible toilet facilities and shared back of house facilities (kitchen, storage etc).

12. Stapleton Hall is recommended to be retained as a major venue for hire space with fit-out to support increased utilisation for community and cultural activities including performances, exhibitions and events.
13. Paddington Library is recommended to be retained and expanded with ongoing joint management by the City and Woollahra. The library is required to be temporarily re-located for the duration of construction works and these temporary arrangements were endorsed by Council in May 2026.

Impacts and Benefits of Proposed Changes

14. The proposed change of use to the former Chauvel Cinema tenancy and Oatley Road accommodation grant program tenancy will improve utilisation of these spaces and will deliver 2 major new venue for hire spaces accessible to a broad range of user groups.
15. The proposed consolidation of the Oxford Street accommodation grant program tenancy with the library space will provide an additional 60-65sqm of library floor space and will result in the termination of the current accommodation grant program lease with Eastside Radio Station.
16. Subject to Council endorsement it is proposed to offer Eastside Radio the opportunity to relocate to the lower ground floor accommodation grant program tenancy at 50-52 Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross. The relocation is proposed to be offered on an up to 5-year term.

Recommended Project Scope

17. The key objectives for the project are to:
 - (a) deliver a revitalised community facility completing all required renewal and upgrade works to enable the next 50 years of community and cultural use and
 - (b) maximise the utilisation of all areas within the building.
18. The vision for the project is to be:
 - (a) A flexible cultural and community building - retaining, rebuilding and reimagining Paddington Town Hall to provide flexible, multipurpose cultural and community spaces.
 - (b) A circular design - leveraging enhancing and extending the useful life of the building, prioritising reuse, repair, recycling and retention of building fabric.
 - (c) A lively local landmark - modernising the building's services and facilities to support the on-going community and cultural use and identity of the site.
19. The project scope includes:

A Renewed Entry

20. The Oatley Road building entry will be renewed and open into a generous foyer which will provide a shared circulation and gathering space connecting the ground and first floor community and cultural facilities.

21. The foyer will provide access to shared facilities (toilets, kitchen, storage etc) and include new stairs along with a passenger and goods lift providing universal and service access to all areas of the building.

Renewed Community and Cultural Facilities

22. Paddington Library - Works within the library will include required renewal of building services and finishes and conversion of the current Oxford Street accommodation grant program tenancy to library space.
23. Stapleton Hall - Works to the original hall will include required renewal of building services, repair / restoration of heritage elements and interior finishes and fit-out to support ongoing use as a multi-purpose venue-for-hire.
24. Hall 1 (Former Oatley Road accommodation grant program tenancy) - Works will include removal of a series of internal walls and mezzanine floors to return the space to its original configuration, creating a large hall with high ceilings and natural light. Building services renewals, and the interior finishes and fit-out of the space will support a range of community and cultural uses.
25. Hall 2 (Former Chauvel Cinema Commercial tenancy) - Works will include removal of the raked floor and cinema seating, restoration of the heritage ceiling and reinstatement of windows to return the space to its original configuration, creating a large hall with high ceilings and natural light. Building services renewals, and the interior finishes and fit-out of the space will support a range of community and cultural uses.

Sustainability

26. Embodied Carbon - The project prioritises reuse and retention of building fabric. The works will extend the useful life of the building and minimise the addition of new building fabric.
27. Water - Potable water will be used for essential services only. Non-potable water will be used for toilet flushing where permissible, subject to potential for dual reticulation in heritage building. Rainwater collection and storage will be maximised.
28. Electricity and Energy Use - Works will aim to reduce energy use through specification of energy efficient mechanical services and fixtures and fittings. Returning Hall 1 and Hall 2 to their original form will allow natural daylight to the building interiors reducing current building energy use.
29. Gas - The project will include removal of all gas to the site.

Heritage Restoration

30. The renewal and upgrade works will restore significant heritage fabric in accordance with the recommendations of the Conservation Management Plan.

Acoustics

31. Acoustic mitigation will focus on reducing noise transfer between spaces, rather than achieving full acoustic separation of the spaces. Improvements to acoustics will be achieved through measures such as air locks and ceiling insulation. Some noise transmission through the heritage structure is expected to remain but will be manageable given the proposed uses across the site.

Key Implications**Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision**

32. 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. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 3 - Public places for all - Renewal of Paddington Town Hall will contribute to a local main street as a thriving hub with creativity at its heart.
 - (b) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities - Paddington Town Hall will strengthen connections and networks within local communities and businesses.
 - (c) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural life - The renewal and upgrade of Paddington Town Hall will deliver a revitalised community facility to enable the next 50 years of community and cultural uses for Paddington.

Organisational Impact

33. Paddington Town Hall will continue to be managed by the City of Sydney. Staffing requirements for the management of Hall 1 and Hall 2 as Venue for Hire spaces will be reviewed and may require additional resourcing, this will be considered in future year financial planning if required.

Risks

34. The renewal of Paddington Town Hall is a major project. Project risk assessments will be reviewed and updated through the life of the project in consideration of the principles in the City's risk appetite, which states that:
 - (a) We are open to taking risks that align with our strategic objectives and are within our capacity to manage effectively.
 - (b) We encourage a culture of responsible risk taking to support innovation, excellence and continuous improvement.
 - (c) We identify and evaluate emerging risks to ensure timely and appropriate responses.

35. Key project risks include:

- (a) Community Support - Paddington Town Hall is located within a dense urban setting with residential developments in close proximity and the proposed building upgrade may not be supported by the community. A detailed engagement plan has been developed and early consultation has already been completed. Further consultation will be undertaken through the notification of the Development Application.
- (b) Existing Building Conditions - The first stage of the building was built in 1891 and the site has been subject to several stages of expansion and renewal / upgrade. Latent conditions may impact construction timeframes and budget. Early investigative works are scheduled to identify latent conditions prior to commencement of construction.

Social / Cultural / Community

36. The objective of the Paddington Town Hall renewal is to provide flexible, multipurpose community spaces that will enhance the existing social significance of the building and increase utilisation of existing spaces.

Environmental

37. The renewal and upgrade of Paddington Town Hall is aligned with the City's Environmental Strategy 2025-2030.

Economic

38. The increased utilisation of Paddington Town Hall has the potential to contribute to the local main street as a thriving hub and increase the economic activity in local businesses.

Financial Implications

39. A project budget of \$45 million was endorsed by Council in June 2026 and is included in the City's FY27 Long Term Financial Plan.

Relevant Legislation

40. Project delivery will be in accordance with relevant planning and approval legislation and regulations, including the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW).

Critical Dates / Time Frames

41. Current program dates are:

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|-----|--------------------------------|------------------|
| (a) | Development application lodged | Late 2026 |
| (b) | Construction documentation | Early - mid 2027 |
| (c) | Construction tender | Mid - end 2027 |
| (d) | Construction start | Early 2028 |
| (e) | Construction finish | Mid 2029 |

Options

42. The whole-of-building renewal and upgrade works are required to be undertaken.

43. The following options were considered:

- (a) Option 1 – Changes in use as outlined in this report.
- (b) Option 2 – No change of use.

44. It is recommended to proceed with Option 1 as this will:

- (a) create 2 new large venue-for-hire spaces available for community and creative use
- (b) improve utilisation of Stapleton Hall through co-ordinated management of bookings
- (c) expand the improve the library.

45. The increase in utilisation capable of being supported through the proposed changes in use have already been demonstrated with bookings in Stapleton Hall increasing by approximately 30% since the former Chauvel Cinema commercial tenancy has been vacant.

Public Consultation

46. From 26 August 2025 to 25 September 2025, the community was asked about their connection to Paddington Town Hall. The consultation was promoted through email direct marketing and onsite signage. Consultation activities included an online survey and door knocking in the local area. Eighty-nine participants provided feedback through online surveys, written submissions and phone calls.

47. Key themes identified in the feedback included:
- (a) Protecting and celebrating the building's heritage and character, including the architectural detail.
 - (b) Better utilising spaces for community and creative activity, with more spaces available for affordable hire and more use of the main hall.
 - (c) Valuing and improving the cinema as a cultural space that needs refurbishment and more flexible use.
 - (d) Valuing and improving the library, especially adding quieter study areas and better amenities.
 - (e) Improving accessibility, including clearer entry points, better lift access and accessible facilities.
48. The recommended project scope has been developed in response to the feedback and includes restoration of the building's significant heritage fabric and improved accessibility and facilities, and the proposed changes in use will:
- (a) create 2 new large venues-for-hire spaces
 - (b) improve utilisation of Stapleton Hall through co-ordinated management and booking of spaces
 - (c) allow for more flexible use of the former Chauvel Cinema space as a venue-for-hire space which can host film screenings
 - (d) create approximately an additional 60-65qm of library floor space.
49. The next stage of consultation will incorporate statutory notification periods and exhibition undertaken as part of the Development Application process.

KIM WOODBURY

Chief Operating Officer

Matthew Taylor, Development Manager