

Attachment A

**Engagement report –
Paddington Town Hall renewal: phase 1**

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Executive summary

The City of Sydney is developing a concept plan for the renewal of Paddington Town Hall, one of the city's most important civic buildings and a valued community landmark. This report summarises what we heard during community consultation undertaken in **August–September 2025**. The consultation asked people about their connection to the Paddington Town Hall, including how they use it, what they value most about it and what memories that they treasure.

Community feedback shows strong support for the renewal. People expressed deep affection for the building's heritage and architecture. They want to see its character protected and its facilities modernised. There was clear enthusiasm for strengthening the building's role as a community and cultural hub, as a place for connection, creativity and accessible local activity.

Key feedback themes included:

- **Protecting and celebrating the building's heritage and character**, including the architectural detail.
- **Better utilising spaces for community and creative activity**, with more spaces available for affordable hire and more use of the main hall.
- **Valuing and improving the cinema** as a cultural space that needs refurbishment and more flexible use.
- **Valuing and improving the library**, especially adding quieter study areas and better amenities.
- **Improving accessibility**, including clearer entry points, better lift access and accessible facilities.

Overall, participants expressed strong pride in Paddington Town Hall and want the renewal to make it more open, active and welcoming while preserving the qualities that make it unique.

Overview

Background

Paddington Town Hall is one of Sydney's most important civic buildings. Completed in 1891, it's the second-largest town hall in the area and a prominent example of Victorian Free Classical architecture. Designed by architect John Edward Kemp, it features rare interior elements by Walter Burley Griffin and is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register.

Over time, the building has adapted to meet changing community needs. Today, it includes an events hall, library, cinema and creative spaces but it has not had a major upgrade in more than 50 years.

We are developing a concept plan for the renewal to ensure Paddington Town Hall continues to support local culture, events, and community life for the next 50 years. Our goal is to make the landmark more welcoming, accessible, and functional. The proposed renewal project will modernise services and facilities while maintaining the building's historical and cultural significance.

Engagement

From **26 August 2025 to 25 September 2025**, we asked the community to tell us about their connection to Paddington Town Hall; how they use it, what they value and the memories they treasure.

We undertook consultation at this early stage in the project to ensure community needs influence planning for the project. Community input will inform operational considerations, programming decisions, and access improvements.

Consultation activities included an online survey and door knocking in the local area. The consultation was promoted in collaboration with Woollahra council through email direct marketing and onsite signage.

This report outlines the community engagement activities that took place to support the consultation and summarises the key findings from the consultation.

Purpose

The purpose of this early phase engagement was to inform and consult with the community and relevant stakeholders on the proposed renewal of Paddington Town Hall. While the overall use of the building is predetermined, feedback was sought to understand the community's perspective on how existing spaces are used, what improvements are needed, and how to enhance community access and experience.

Objectives

- Ensure the community is informed about the renewal project.
 - Provide opportunities for input into how the space is used, improvements, and programming.
 - Gather feedback on accessibility, inclusivity, and operational considerations.
-

Engagement reach

Eighty-nine participants provided feedback through online surveys, written submissions and phone calls. Promotion and outreach ensured local awareness and encouraged broad participation from residents, community organisations and local business groups. Survey respondents represent a good diversity of age ranges and Paddington Town Hall service users. Most respondents live in the area.

Figure 1. Engagement activity and responses

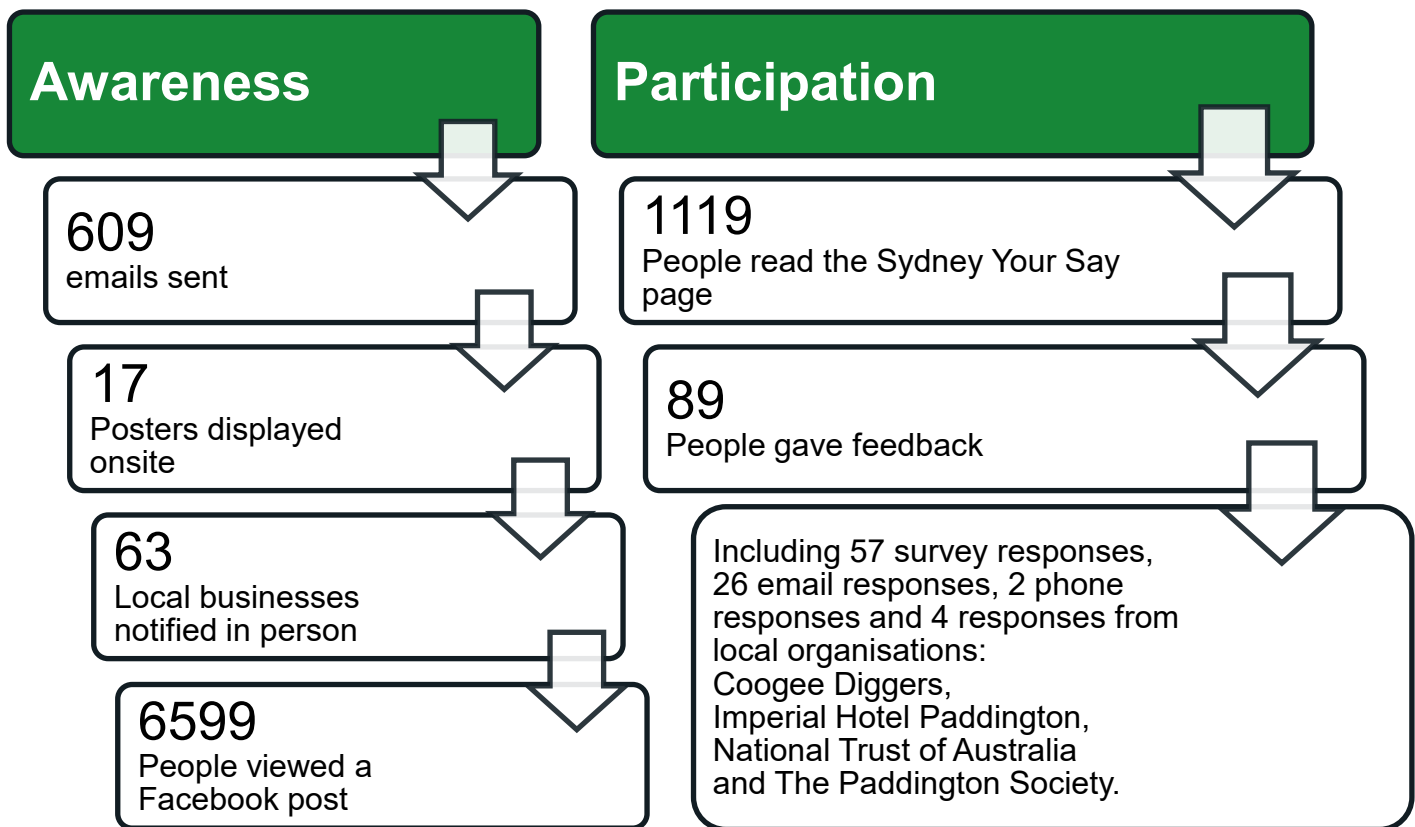


Figure 2. Survey respondent snapshot

Survey respondent snapshot

65% live in Paddington, Darlinghurst or Surry Hills.

79% are City of Sydney residents, 40% work in the area, 33% own property in the City, 10% are visitors and 9% own a business.*

60% are aged over 55 years
27% are aged 35-54 years, 12% are aged 18-34.

32% visit Paddington Town Hall weekly, 25% visit monthly, 42% visit rarely or once per year.

74% attend the cinema, 61% attend the library, 18% attend events in the main hall, 3% pass by when they are in the area.*

95% speak English at home.

*respondents could select more than one answer.

Key findings

What people value about Paddington Town Hall

We asked people to tell us what they value most about Paddington Town Hall.

Our survey offered a multiple-choice list of reasons to value the building. Respondents could select more than one option and add their own reason. People told us they value:

- Location and access (49 responses)
- Heritage, architecture or character of the building (48 responses)
- My sense of history or connection to the place (32 responses)
- Community events (31 responses)
- Cultural programs or performances (27 responses)
- Other things including the cinema, the library, the distinctive clock, and the building's role as an iconic centre of Paddington (9 responses)

We then asked people to tell us more about why they value these things. Across survey responses and email feedback, the topics most mentioned were:

- Accessible space for community and creative activity.
- The heritage and character of the building.
- The local cinema space as a place for community connection.
- The library as a community space.

Topics raised across survey feedback and email responses are closely aligned. Both emphasised protection of the building's heritage, improved community access and usability, and stronger activation of the cinema space, library, and hall as local cultural spaces.

Spaces for community and creative activity.

Many comments said the Paddington Town Hall should be used more actively as a place for community life. They spoke about how important the venues, activities and events in the building are for the social and cultural life of Paddington, and how they help people feel connected to their community. People talked about wanting more accessible spaces for meetings, workshops, classes, performances, exhibitions, and areas that are affordable and easy for locals to book. Several said parts of the building, including the main hall and upper floors, feel underused and could host a wider range of activities such as dance nights, festival events and lectures. Other comments emphasised that creating more flexible, multi-use spaces would make the building livelier, strengthen social connection and support local artists, groups and families.

- “The Grand (Stapleton) Hall is magnificent but underused. I've been to events there and fashion sales and it always makes an impression, but if it's to play a bigger role as a community hub, then it needs proper upkeep and affordable hire for community groups”
- “It would be wonderful if a redesign featured elements of a community hub like Surry Hills Library.”
- “A place where art could be shown, public talks given in intimate spaces, workshops to be enjoyed — people gathering and community thriving.”

The heritage and character of the building

When asked what they value about Paddington Town Hall, people spoke with affection about its beauty, history and architecture, describing it as an iconic landmark that gives Paddington its distinctive character. Comments conveyed a deep pride in the building and a desire to see its historic features preserved and celebrated as part of the area's identity.

- “The heritage architecture is stunning. The clock tower is beautiful is an iconic feature of Paddington.”

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- “Paddington Town Hall is a beautiful historic building that provides community to locals and visitors.”
- “It’s a magnificent heritage building for the community to enjoy and use.”

Valuing and improving the cinema space

Many comments mention the cinema space. The tone of most feedback acknowledges that the cinema is not well attended and needs refurbishment. Some comments have suggestions to broaden the use and attract more audiences and activity, such as dividing the large room into smaller spaces. Others simply say they enjoy having a local cinema and would like to see the space improved. Overall, people told us that they value the social and cultural role of the cinema space as a place that brings people together and strengthens Paddington’s identity as a creative hub.

- “...some practical upgrades there would be welcome. But the cinemas must remain as they’re an important cultural outlet in a suburb that doesn’t have many”
- “Both cinema spaces could also be used for talks, lectures, presentations, etc....”
- “As sorely as I would mourn the loss of the Chauvel, perhaps the priority now is to save any cinema complex at all for our neighbourhood.”

The library as a community space

The library drew strong support from respondents, who described it as welcoming, accessible and central to community life in Paddington. People said it offers a calm place to read, study and meet others. Several comments, while positive, suggested the library needs more quiet study rooms, better lighting and improved access to power outlets for devices. Others mentioned that noise from events can make it difficult to concentrate and called for spaces that allow different types of use to coexist.

- “The library is a vital resource, but it needs more study spaces, including quiet study rooms and cubbies for individual work.”
- “It’s a great little library where I can study and borrow books in a relaxed environment.”
- “All generations in the community place great value on the space and its suitability for a wide variety of activities.”

Email and phone responses

Email feedback covered a wide range of topics, with the strongest focus on retaining and improving the cinema, as well as using the main hall more effectively, and on maintaining the library as a valued community space. Many comments supported the renewal overall and called for more accessible and flexible areas for community and creative use. Other suggestions included better accessibility, and use of historically accurate colours and finishes. A small number of respondents mentioned specific ideas including mobility scooter charging, acknowledgment of traditional owners, and an exhibition about the building’s history. Details of the physical improvements suggested in email responses are listed in the following section.

Four local organisations gave feedback, three by email and one by phone.

The Paddington Society told us they strongly support the renewal of Paddington Town Hall, emphasising its architectural, historical, and social significance as a State-listed heritage landmark. Their submission encouraged sensitive, unobtrusive upgrades that preserve the building’s integrity while improving functionality, particularly through careful repairs, modest modernisation, and continued community and cultural use of the library, cinemas and Grand Hall.

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) welcomed the City of Sydney’s investment in maintaining and renewing Paddington Town Hall, recognising its heritage significance as a landmark late Victorian building listed on both the National Trust and State Heritage registers. The Trust recommended reviewing and

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updating the existing Conservation Management Plan to ensure future works are guided by up-to-date heritage principles and protect the building's culturally significant features.

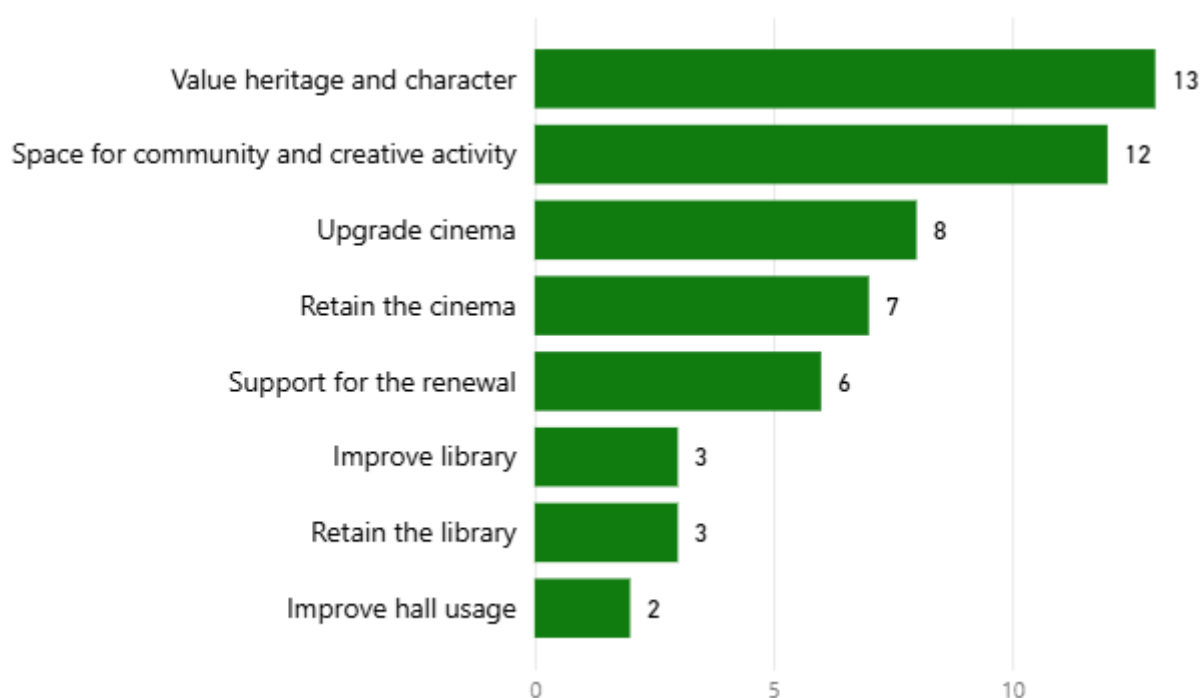
The Imperial Hotel Paddington suggests that avoiding a bar, restaurant or a nightclub offering within the building would support local hotels.

The **Coogee Diggers**, which is finalising an amalgamation with Paddington RSL, expressed strong interest in collaborating with the City of Sydney to activate the Paddington Town Hall and surrounding area through live music and community events. They suggested the Town Hall could serve as a festival hub, while recommending further consultation with the live music industry to guide future use and activation.

General comments

We asked survey respondents if there is anything else they would like to tell us about the Paddington Town Hall renewal. People reiterated that they value the heritage and character of the building, that they would like the spaces in the building to be accessible for community and creative activities and events, and that they would like the cinema and library to be retained and improved. Some people expressed general support for the renewal, which aligned to the overwhelmingly supportive tone of all comments.

Figure 3. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the Paddington Town Hall major renewal.



Current use

We asked survey respondents to tell us how often they visit the Paddington Town Hall and why they visit. People could choose more than one reason for visiting. The responses were evenly spread across the range of options for visiting, including the cinema, the library, and performances and events in the main hall. Most people chose more than one option. Only one person told us they only pass by the building when in the area. The other people who selected this option also visit the building for the library, the cinema or events in the main hall.

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The responses showed an even mix of age ranges for the different reasons to visit, and an even mix of use and visitation patterns for people who live, work and visit the City.

Reason for visiting	No. of responses
Cinema	42
Paddington Library	35
I pass the building when I am in the area	32
Performances or events in the main hall	18
I don't visit	1

How often do you visit	No. of responses
A few times a year	20
Weekly	18
Monthly	14
Rarely	4

Memories of Paddington Town Hall

We asked community members to tell us about their favourite memories of time spent at Paddington Town Hall. Their recollections highlight the role of this building as a beloved local venue for community connection.

Memories shared by community members range from times long past to recent experiences, including:

- “The last time I attended the town hall was for a ballroom dance competition. I was impressed with the grandeur of the building and how enjoyable it was to dance on the floor.”
- “The Paddington Society was delighted to have been able to hire the hall for our 50th Anniversary dinner in 2014 – a memorable evening, fondly remembered by all.”
- “Going to balls & concerts there in the 1970s & 1980s”
- “School Formal in 1971. It felt glamorous and very special to be dressed up, and to dance in such a place.”
- “I like to watch the sunset from up on the Paddington Reservoir Reserve looking west towards the Paddington Town Hall.”
- “I attended a graduation of the local Alexander Mackie Art College (as it was known then), the vibe was lively, festive, people were jubilant. The event was very creative, it felt very exciting. And a privilege to host this in a grand historic venue.”

Community suggestions for improvements

The table below summarises specific suggestions for physical improvements to the building given through both survey and email responses. In total, 47 responses included 78 different suggestions for physical improvements.

Cinema and foyer areas

- Restore and refurbish the cinema
- Replace worn carpet
- Replace or reupholster seating
- Improve lighting in cinemas
- Fix ceiling leaks
- Upgrade projection and sound systems
- Add larger cinema screens
- Divide large cinema into two smaller theatres
- Create three smaller cinemas
- Reduce size of existing cinemas
- Upgrade shared lift for cinema and hall access
- Provide better street-level access
- Add modern lift or escalator
- Upgrade foyer and ticketing areas
- Improve cinema bar and refreshment area
- Provide more seating in cinema bar
- Make balcony and foyer areas more inviting
- Add a ground-floor café, bar, or bistro
- Add a friendly café rather than an upmarket restaurant
- Add signage and wayfinding
- Support live music, talks and film festivals within cinema spaces

Library and adjacent community spaces

- Expand the library
- Redesign the library layout
- Add more study desks and quiet study rooms
- Add private study cubicles
- Add separate program or story-time space
- Add multipurpose activity room connected to library
- Add power outlets and charging points
- Make the library brighter and more modern
- Provide affordable bookable community rooms
- Provide meeting rooms for community groups
- Add mobility-scooter charging point
- Add fitness/wellbeing spaces (yoga, Pilates, dance, seniors' classes)
- Create a neighbourhood or community centre similar to Surry Hills Library

Grand (Stapleton) Hall and performance spaces

- Preserve and maintain the Grand (Stapleton) Hall
- Preserve the timber dance floor
- Upgrade lighting and improve acoustics
- Modernise backstage and green room areas
- Add flexible staging and event infrastructure
- Improve entry and exit points for events
- Provide more storage for furniture and equipment
- Add regeneration or catering kitchen
- Adapt hall for live music, theatre, and community performance
- Provide affordable hire for community and non-profit groups
- Create festival, fringe, and performing-arts hub
- Add temporary exhibition or display spaces
- Open under-used areas for creative and community use
- Add art workshop, rehearsal, and exhibition rooms

Exterior, facade, and heritage features

- Repair peeling exterior paint and rising damp
- Replace broken external lights
- Repaint using historically accurate colours
- Use lime-based breathable paints and plaster
- Restore historically accurate interiors
- Preserve façade, architectural details, and clock tower
- Maintain civic and heritage character
- Provide public exhibition about Town Hall history and heritage
- Include First Nations acknowledgment through displays or artwork
- Avoid a generic refit or over-modernisation

Accessibility and circulation

- Improve overall accessibility throughout the building
- Provide accessible entries and paths from Oxford Street
- Add modern lift or escalator
- Upgrade building services and facilities (electrical, HVAC, plumbing)
- Ensure accessible toilets and event circulation

Facilities and amenities

- Add more and better public toilets
- Provide more ladies' toilets near event spaces
- Improve lighting in toilets and foyer areas
- Add rooftop bar or restaurant
- Provide regeneration kitchen to support events

Engagement activities

Sydney Your Say webpage

A Sydney Your Say webpage was created. The page included a summary of the renewal project and other key information about the consultation. There were 1119 unique views of the Sydney Your Say page.

The main source of web traffic was from email marketing, organic searches and referral from the Facebook post, which suggests strong awareness and interest from the relevant audience.

Stakeholder emails

An email was sent to 390 community members known to have an interest in the Paddington Town Hall to let them know about the consultation.

Another email was sent to 232 stakeholders known to have an interest in creative and cultural spaces in the City of Sydney inviting them to give feedback.

E-news inclusions

The consultation was included in both the August and September editions of the Sydney Your Say e- newsletter (4960 subscribers) and was shared by Woollahra Council in the Woollahra Libraries e-news on 5 & 22 September.

Posters

Posters promoting the consultation were displayed onsite at the entrances to the building, inside Paddington library and cinema spaces, and across the network of City of Sydney libraries. Posters included a QR code linking to the Sydney Your Say page and online survey.

Social media post

A Facebook post promoting the consultation performed very well with lots of genuine engagement: 6599 views, 48 interactions, 35 likes and reactions, 10 comments, 3 shares.

Appendix

Appendix A: Facebook post



Appendix B: Poster



Appendix C: Sydney Your Say e-news article



Image: Will Jones / City of Sydney

Your say on the Paddington Town Hall renewal

We're developing a concept plan for the building's renewal to ensure it continues to support local culture, events and community life for the next 50 years.

Share your thoughts to help inform our planning. Consultation closes Thursday 25 September.

[Read more](#)

