Item 14.1

Notices of Motion

Public Domain Works to Support the Reopening of Griffin Theatre, Kings Cross

By Councillor Worling

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

(i) the historic SBW Stables Theatre in Kings Cross - the little theatre on the hill - has been Griffin Theatre Company's home since 1 April 1980; establishing itself as one of the great engine rooms of Australian theatre, premiering over 400 new Australian works. It is the only theatre company in Australia exclusively dedicated to Australian playwriting

(ii) in the mid-1980s the future of the theatre was threatened, when the building's then owners put it up for sale. The late Dr Rodney Seaborn purchased the building through the Seaborn, Broughton and Walford Foundation, a charitable trust he established. The theatre was renamed the SBW Stables and leased to Griffin for a nominal rent. He also provided Griffin with a nearby terrace house he owned to use as its offices

(iii) the SBW Foundation has subsequently provided significant philanthropic support to Australian theatre and the performing arts, including purchasing and restoring the Independent Theatre in North Sydney

(iv) in December 2020, the SBW Foundation purchased the terrace at 12 Nimrod Street as part of a plan for the theatre's future

(v) in November 2022, Griffin purchased the theatre and terrace from the SBW Foundation, enabled by a $5 million donation from the Neilson Foundation. Griffin has since embarked on a landmark journey to expand the theatre and address its accessibility issues

(vi) in late 2024, Griffin awarded the building contract for the redevelopment to Structure Australia and demolition started in January 2025

(vii) when it reopens in 2027, the main entrance will be oriented to the north and pulled back from the corner of the site, while the secondary entrance will be located to the south of the site, screened by a small garden

(viii) in July 2024, Council approved an ad hoc cash grant of $1,000,000 (excluding GST) to Griffin Theatre Company Ltd, sourced from the 2024/25 General Contingency Fund, to help fund the Capital Works

(ix) designed by Tim Greer of Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, the new 3-storey venue will have an expanded footprint of 40%, a 136-seat auditorium, 2 new creative spaces and, crucially, will retain its unique kite-shaped stage. The theatre will also have the building's first-ever lift, wheelchair accessible seating and a wheelchair accessible back of house. The venue has also increased its access for artists and audiences who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing and vision impaired

(x) in line with the upgrade of the theatre, Nimrod Street, nearest to Craigend street, would benefit from resealing, bike racks, seating and outdoor dining activation, to maximise community engagement and sense of place

(xi) while the building was being dismantled, around 80% of the bricks and the historic barn doors were salvaged for use in the new building's facade

(xii) salvaging the sandstone bricks for re-use as part of the redevelopment or public domain enhancements will help ensure connectivity between the upgraded theatre and the site's heritage

(xiii) the No Parking zone on Nimrod Street, previously outside the Stables doors, would also benefit from being relocated to the bend in Nimrod Street where the new entrance will be. This will provide an excellent drop-off zone for audiences with access needs

(B) Council further note that the Griffin Theatre Company and the SBW Foundation have long desired to have the area immediately outside the SBW Stables Theatre renamed Rodney Seaborn Place in recognition of his crucial role in ensuring the survival of the Stables Theatre and his significant support for the performing arts

(C) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

(i) investigate public domain enhancements on Nimrod Street (including road resealing, kerb and gutter works and reinstating the sandstone kerb and gutter as appropriate) and a relevant funding source, to be completed in time for the theatre's reopening, if possible

(ii) investigate what traffic calming measures could be introduced to Nimrod Street as soon as possible; including the relocation of the No Parking zone, and utilising car spaces out the front of the new-look theatre to encourage outdoor dining activation

(iii) with appropriate City teams, meet with Griffin Theatre to discuss additional seating and bike parking facilities in the vicinity, including the possibility of repurposing the 6 large sandstone blocks recovered in the excavation for seating on Nimrod Street nearest to Craigend Street

(iv) investigate the naming of this area as Rodney Seaborn Place, in consultation with Griffin Theatre Company, the SBW Foundation and other relevant stakeholders.

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