

# City's Chinatown crying out for attention

By JOSEPH LAM RHIANNON DOWN

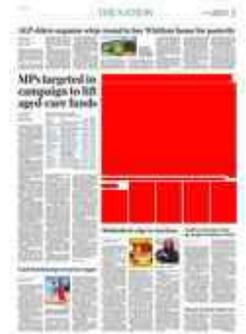
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As Lunar New Year celebrations kicked off across the nation at the weekend, there was one important area looking a little sadder than most.

For Lease signs lined several empty shops along a dimly lit Dixon Street in Sydney's Chinatown, enclosed by paint-chipped entry gates and cracked lion sculptures.

On Friday, a park bench that businesses had complained about for more than a year had its dangerous marking tape removed but wasn't repaired before celebrations.

"Look," said Chinatown restaurateur Jonathan Yee pointing to the bench, "that's been taped like that for a year. Look at these arches, we've been asking the council to refurbish these for 10 years."

Mr Yee's father, Stanley, opened Emperor's Garden, a Chinatown institution, in 1979.

While the pandemic may have closed several stores in Chinatown, the area has faced many underlying issues and competing interests for years, he said.

The City of Sydney has organised 80 events to celebrate Lunar New Year this year, but few will take place in Chinatown.

Darling Square, which opened in April 2018, is a privately owned area about 50m from Dixon Street. Its development included demolishing the Sydney Entertainment Centre and made up part of the NSW governments \$3.4bn revitalisation of Darling Harbour.

In the past, the Entertainment Centre had brought about 12,000 people a week to dine in Chinatown, said George Wing Kee, a

founder of the Haymarket Chamber of Commerce.

Today, it is Darling Square that gets all the action.

"I don't know the way things are going but if you look at Darling Square and Chinatown it's like chalk and cheese — it's got all the attraction, it's got the wow factor that Chinatown should have," Mr Wing Kee said.

City of Sydney councillor Craig Chung said Chinatown had been brought to its knees due to the advent of Darling Square, the light rail, COVID-19, and neglect from the council.

"I think Town Hall has forgotten about this golden goose which is part of the fabric of Sydney — I really think it is a wilful ignoring of Chinatown," he said.

Lord Mayor Clover Moore's office said the council continued to work with local businesses and

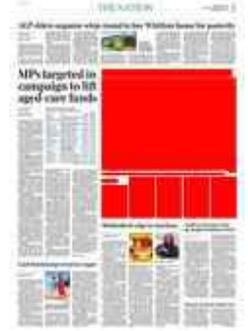
community groups when planning Lunar New Year celebrations.

Despite these concerns, Dixon Street was still busy on Sunday.

Jonathan Seif, 25, made the hours' bus ride from Winston Hills in Sydney's northwest into Chinatown on Sunday for lunch at Ho Jiak, a celebrated Malaysian restaurant. He said he chose to head to the busy strip to find good food and be at the heart of the action.

"(Chinatown) is great; it's full of energy and there are lots of people out today," he said. "It is quite a trip but I make it now and then just to get a change of scenery."

An Nguyen brought his family into Chinatown from Lugarno in the city's southwest to enjoy the Chinese lanterns hanging over the strip. "I don't come in here very often except for special things like (Lunar) New Year," he said.



SAM MOOY

**Dancers from the Australian Chinese Buddhist Society were the main attraction at the Khoo Chean House in Sydney's Chinatown on Sunday**