

Sexing up the Cross

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Sexing up the Cross

Bold plan to turn suburb from brassy to classy

BEN PIKE

LESS traffic, more music and neon lights and a new public square underneath the Coca-Cola sign are all part of an ambitious plan to put the sizzle back into Sydney's sexiest suburb.

The most comprehensive Kings Cross study since its night-life was killed by the lockdown laws, TV streaming and the pandemic has found it is being stifled by sluggish foot traffic, empty shops and locals so entitled they complain about noise coming from cafes during lunchtime.

The Committee for Sydney's Vision For Kings Cross report, commissioned by the City of Sydney, is calling for the suburb to be declared a "night-time hub" as part of its comprehensive vision for the future.

The move would ensure live music and theatre, small

bars, restaurants and office space thrive alongside the established brothels, strip clubs and larger venues.

But the report highlighted the need to ensure Kings Cross didn't return to the bad old days when the riot squad was routinely called and 20,000 visitors flooded the streets at the weekend.

"The old Cross is not coming back — but it's still there and its future is going to be a place that is not just for young people, but it's for everybody," Committee for Sydney CEO Gabriel Metcalfe told The Sunday Telegraph during a tour this week.

"It's not just for staying up all night, but it's going to be a place to go in the day and in the evening. It's still going to be a centre of fun and night-life but it's going to be more than that."

The report is based on comprehensive interviews

with 357 residents and major stakeholders, including Business Sydney, NSW Treasury, the Potts Point Partnership and NSW Police.

At the centre of the Committee for Sydney's vision is creating a new public square underneath the Coca-Cola sign near Darlinghurst Rd and Roslyn St.

The proposal would reduce six lanes of traffic to a single lane in each direction, creating greater space for a pedestrian plaza and reuniting north and south Darlinghurst Rd.

"Fixing this intersection, the actual cross from which the Cross gets its name, is a must," Mr Metcalfe said.

"In the '50s, the Cross was famous for its neon signs, which lit the main streets and laneways — the famous Coca-Cola sign is just a small remnant of what was once a

glistening neon boulevard.

"Just imagine a thread of neon lights in shopfronts and side streets winding through the Cross, even a neon version of Arthur Stace's famous Eternity signature."

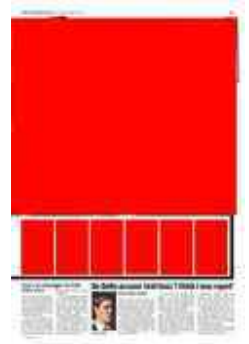
Kings Cross/Potts Point still has 10 brothels (Surry Hills still has the most with 18) but DollHouse and Bada-Bing are the only strip clubs still open.

Plans include repurposing closed strip clubs as live music/performance venues.

The Riverside Theatre at Parramatta was cited as a good example of a live venue creating a thriving restaurant and cafe culture nearby.

There are at least seven empty shops between the Coca-Cola sign and the fountain near the police station, with many landlords "waiting to see what happens" before committing to new ventures.

Katherine O'Regan, exec-



utive director of Business Sydney, said the suburb shouldn't be "dominated only by strip clubs and alcohol".

"It should be a place where you can push your pram just as much as go to the pub," she said.

"It can become somewhere for those who work at night in Sydney to dine or shop, a place that is safe, inclusive and alive with spontaneous entertainment and activities, generating significant business growth."

Many residents complain about noise variously to NSW Police, the council and the Environmental Protection Authority.

One of the 23 "key moves" includes centralising noise complaints to one government agency.

Josh Cook and Nina Purton run Silly Tart Kitchen on Kellet St and said the new plans would be a game-changer for the area.

Mr Cook would like to see cleaner streets, signage about the suburb's rich history and the introduction of neon lights.

He also said there is "way too much power that is given to residents".

"The Sunday just gone we got three or four noise complaints from the same woman, who has lived here nine months," Mr Cook, whose business has been there for four years, said.

"She was very vocal and very nasty towards us. The

complaints started at about 5pm and they went until about 9.30pm.

"There are businesses on this street that have had to change their whole sound system because somebody is complaining."

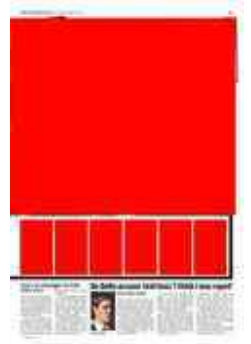
Since 2014, when lockdown laws restricted late night alcohol sales and movement between venues, delivery drivers have replaced bikies and gyms have replaced bars.

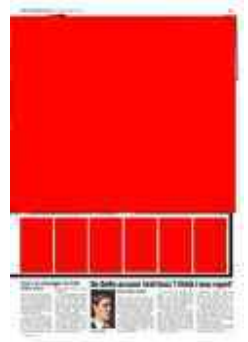
The report also calls for the area's scruffy palm trees to be cut down to stop ibis birds, commonly known as "bin chickens", from nesting.

Lord Mayor Clover Moore said Kings Cross has been "a bohemian heartland, an underworld stronghold and a lively late-night destination" but it's time to start a new chapter.

"We're confident the next chapter in that history will be safe and lively, with a thriving residential community and a diverse economy that includes fabulous nightclubs and bars, restaurants, theatres, shops and cultural institutions open late — a Kings Cross we can be proud of and our global city deserves," she said.

"I welcome the Committee for Sydney's recommendations, many of which the City has been progressing for some time, including pedestrian-friendly improvements, increased tree canopies and a more diverse night-time economy."





Pedestrian friendly

AND THE SURVEY SAYS ...
357 residents, business owners and Kings Cross stakeholders surveyed in 2020.

- 59%** said Kings Cross had improved the past five years.
- 30%** said it was worse.
- 82%** want more street gardens and public squares.
- 81%** want more live music venues.
- 77%** want more theatres.
- 77%** want more small bars.
- 74%** want more public art.
- 42%** said local streets had improved the past five years.
- 58%** said street life had deteriorated.

KEY MOVES

- 1** Incentives to provide new theatres and live performance venues.
- 2** Make sections of Darlinghurst Rd a shared zone, limiting traffic to 10km/h.
- 3** Reduce lanes in Darlinghurst Rd and William St.
- 4** Increase the number of laneways and side streets with vehicle speeds limited to 10km/h.
- 5** Businesses to use neon signage as a key identifying marker, add lighting projects to laneways.

We got noise complaints from the same woman, who has lived here nine months

Josh Tart Nina Purton welcome the changes.
Picture: Sam Rutty

Josh Cook

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