CM13.2. Cultural Precinct Master Plan - Results of Public Exhibition

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CONFIDENTIAL	No		
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present the submissions received during public exhibition of the draft Cultural Precinct Master Plan and seek endorsement of the revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan.

Background

The Cultural Precinct is in the heart of Albury, encompassing the city block between Dean, Olive, Swift and Kiewa Streets. The civic parkland of QEII Square is at the centre of the precinct and surrounded by a family of notable cultural institutions and buildings of architectural significance such as (but not limited to) St Matthews Anglican Church, Albury LibraryMuseum, Albury Entertainment Centre, Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA), Retro Lane Café, Albury Post Office, Albury Court House and Murray Conservatorium.

Taylor Cullity Lethlean (TCL) have been engaged to prepare an updated Master Plan for the Cultural Precinct. The objective of this project is to review the 2015 Master Plan in order to provide a collective vision and long-term strategy (10-30 years). This process has involved numerous stakeholder engagements, including key property stakeholders and the wider community. The Master Plan review process also included background document review, research, and detailed site analysis. The Master Plan design has also considered and aligned with related projects such as the Albury Entertainment Centre Convention Wing Redevelopment design process which is occurring concurrently.

The draft Cultural Precinct Master Plan was reported to Council on 26 April 2021 (refer attachment 1) and Council resolved the following:

a. Receives and notes the draft Cultural Precinct Master Plan prepared by Taylor Cullity Lethlean and commends them on the quality of their work;
b. Places the draft Cultural Precinct Master Plan on public exhibition for a period of 28 days;
c. If no objections are received that the draft Cultural Precinct Master Plan be adopted; and
d. Request staff to continue to work with Taylor Cullity Lethlean to develop scenarios for the integration of all existing buildings including the State Government buildings on the southern and eastern sides of the Square, the old Courthouse and Post Office and the properties on the western side, namely St Matthews Rectory and the Belbridge Hague building.
e. That the scope of the CBD Master Plan review include specific built form guidelines for any modifications to existing buildings or new buildings within the cultural precinct.

The draft Master Plan was exhibited from 1 May 2021 to 31 May 2021. A total of 44 submissions were received and these are discussed below.

In response to resolutions (d) and (e) above, staff have continued to work with TCL in relation to existing buildings within the Cultural Precinct and surrounding QEII Square. As part of public exhibition, invitations to provide feedback on the draft Master Plan and opportunity to meet with TCL and Council staff were offered to all precinct property owners. During this phase, meetings were held with St Matthew's Church, Belbridge Hague, Canvas, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, MAMA, LibraryMuseum, Retro Café and Albury Entertainment Centre.

Staff will continue to work with TCL over the coming months as the CBD Master Plan review project commences. As per the resolution, the scope of the CBD Master Plan review will include built form guidelines for any modifications to existing buildings or new buildings within the cultural precinct. This will also incorporate and further consider the Building Guidelines from page 70 of the Cultural Precinct Master Plan. These cover various topics such as design quality, building facades and edges, use and functions, ground-floor activation, denoting clear entries, connections and permeability, heritage considerations, building heights and setbacks.

These Building Guidelines work with the Master Plan for the precinct, in particular, the Urban Design Framework. Together, they help establish a strategy for the precinct moving forward providing a clear structure and urban design and building guidelines for integrated development of the precinct. They seek to provide suitable guidance as well as flexibility to allow innovative approaches and designs, while still ensuring the outcome is responsive to its setting and effectively integrates and adds value to the wider precinct. As noted above the built form guidelines will be further reviewed, expanded, and enhanced as part of the CBD Master Plan review being delivered in 2021/22, and this will subsequently inform a review of Part 11 of the Albury Development Control Plan (DCP). Should Council resolve to endorse the revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan, then these Building Guidelines (from page 70 and other related plans and master plan directions) can be considered as part of the assessment of an application lodged prior to any formal amendments to Part 11 of the Albury DCP.

Issues

Strategic Alignment

The Cultural Precinct Master Plan review aligns to the following Albury2030 outcomes:

- *1.2.4 – Continue to enhance Albury and Lavington CBDs; and*
- *3.7.1 – Activate the cultural precinct and create connections between stakeholder facilities.*

The Cultural Precinct Master Plan review also relates to other Council strategies such as:

- *Albury CBD Master Plan 2009 (review scheduled for 2021/22 and commencing shortly);*
- *Albury Creative Economy Strategy 2017 – 2021;*
- *Cultural Plan 2012 – 2016; and*
- *Heritage Study 2003 (review commencing later in 2021).*

Financial

The Cultural Precinct Master Plan project was delivered within the allocated 2020/21 budget.

Implementation of the draft Master Plan will require resourcing that can be considered through Council's planning and capital works programs and budgeting processes, as well as potential external grant funding opportunities.

Preliminary cost estimates based on the high-level Master Plan estimate works in the order of $20.3 million. This includes full upgrade to the QEII Square space (central lawn area, northern plaza, amphitheatre, lighting, landscaping and furniture, water feature, east and west promenades, tree planting and gardens, Retro Café arbour, art play area and Dean Street entry and decking). It also includes upgrades to some areas around QEII Square such as the plaza to the east of the State Government offices, the Olive Street laneway link to the south of the Court House and renovation to the ground floor of the NSW Government Building (subject to discussions and long-term lease arrangements) to accommodate new amenities (such as public toilets, parents room and change facilities) and other uses to activate the ground floor, such as a café. It is anticipated that opportunities would be explored in relation to potential State and Federal Government grant funding.

Implementation would also require collaboration with other precinct landowners such as the NSW Government. Staging of works would also be explored to align with potential funding and to allow for efficient implementation and potential to align works with other projects (e.g. Albury Entertainment Centre Convention Wing Redevelopment) to minimise disruptions.

Discussion

The draft Master Plan was exhibited from 1 May 2021 to 31 May 2021. A total of 44 submissions were received. This comprised 36 submissions made via online webform, seven submissions via email and one 'submission' via a meeting (where key points raised were requested to be included as a submission).

Two-community drop-in sessions were held on Monday 17 May 2021. Approximately 30-40 people attended and viewed the draft plans and chatted with the project team. Feedback was generally positive.

Attachment 2 includes a verbatim copy of each submission (or summary of the key issues raised for the more detailed email submissions) and a response to each submission, including any recommended changes to the Master Plan. Attachment 3 includes a verbatim copy of the more detailed emailed submissions.

Overall feedback was positive with the majority of submitters supportive of the draft Master Plan.

The online webform included a question asking submitters if they supported the draft Master Plan. 30 out of the 36 online webform submitters supported the draft Master Plan, while six out of the 36 did not support the draft Master Plan.

Themes and issues raised from the 44 submissions varied. Some of the key issues raised and a brief response is provided below. Attachment 2 provides a table responding to each of the 44 submissions in turn. Some responses include recommended changes to the master plan report which are outlined in attachment 2. These changes, and other minor edits where required, have been incorporated in a revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan included in attachment 4.

- **Issue:** Overall general support for the master plan
    - **Response:** Support noted. Several comments noted the precinct will be more inviting, beautiful, and functional. There was also strong support for the proposed water feature.

- **Issue:** Support for, and need to, recognise First Nations/Wiradjuri
    - **Response:** Through the master plan process, meetings and input has been sought and provided from Wiradjuri representatives. Pages 11 and 12 of the Master Plan highlight opportunities for indigenous representation. One example is integration of Wiradjuri artistic elements in the central water feature. The water feature is a significant element of master plan design and provides a key opportunity for Wiradjuri storytelling.

- **Issue:** Noted an increase in paving/hardstand area
    - **Response:** Early site analysis noted some challenges with the existing lawn, with some areas struggling under trees or where heavily trafficked from pedestrians or events. The analysis also noted 'a lack of paths that might link cafe to cafe or institution to institution'. While the draft Master Plan removes the wide central roadway and replaces it with lawn, it is acknowledged there is an overall increase in hard surfaces. The additional paving areas seek to improve the function, flexibility, and accessibility of the precinct. This will be beneficial for both events and day-to-day use and improve accessibility for a variety of uses. While there is an overall increase in hard-stand, there remains significant proportion of lawn and green areas. The Master Plan also proposes additional trees to increase shading within the square including along most paths and paved areas. The proposed water feature will also support local cooling and minimise any warming affect. There may also be further opportunities to increase greenery as part of the detailed design process.

- **Issue:** Queried the suitability of the Retro Café in its location at the end of Retro Lane
    - **Response:** Retro Café was built in its current location in 2016. It is a much-loved community asset and helps activate this part of the square. The master plan proposes a surrounding arbour to help address current issues relating to western heat gain and limited shading and outdoor amenity. These upgrades also assist in integration with the square and increases opportunities for outdoor use, including on the western side (Retro Lane) of the cafe for increased activation and passive surveillance.

- **Issue:** Queried the public realm/landscape focus and seeking further input on built form guidelines
    - **Response:** The Master Plan has focused on QEII Square noting it is Albury's most significant public space and central to the overall precinct. However, the master plan also provides urban design and building guidance. Building Guidelines on page 70 of the Master Plan include topics such as design quality, building facades and edges, use and

functions, ground-floor activation, denoting clear entries, connections and permeability, heritage considerations, building heights and setbacks (linking to the current Development Control Plan provisions that were established following the previous 2009 CBD Master Plans). The Building Guidelines work with the Master Plan including the Urban Design Framework (page 44 of the Master Plan). Together they help establish a strategy for the precinct moving forward. The built form guidelines will also be further reviewed, expanded, and enhanced as part of the CBD Master Plan review being delivered in 2021/22 and which will subsequently inform a review of Part 11 of the Albury Development Control Plan (DCP).

- **Issue:** Suggestions to explore renaming QEII Square
  - **Response:** Name changing is outside of the Master Plan scope. However, the opportunity to explore future branding/naming will be added to the Implementation Action Plan.

- **Issue:** Desire to retain all existing trees
  - **Response:** Page 67 of the draft Master Plan notes the following:

    The Master Plan aims to retain existing tree canopy cover and proposes additional trees for shade and amenity and to increase canopy cover within the precinct. The design proposes relocation of existing young avenue stock to be utilised within the design. Removal of one tree will be required due to the proposed location of the water feature. The Master Plan notes the potential removal of two trees due to arboricultural assessment of the gum tree near the existing Courts and the Gleditsia that is too close to the existing Chinese Elm.

    As noted above, the Master Plan has aimed to retain existing trees where possible. Further consideration of tree retention (subject to further arboricultural assessment) and planting of advanced species will be considered in the detailed design phase.

- **Issue:** Support for upgrading the toilets and inclusion of all-abilities change facilities with the amenities upgrade.
  - **Response:** Support noted. Page 68 of the draft Master Plan discusses public toilets and amenities. This identifies opportunities for incorporating all abilities change facilities in the proposed redesigned and upgraded toilet facilities.

Risk

- **Business Risk** – Implementation of the draft Master Plan will require resourcing that can be considered through Council's planning and capital works programs and budgeting processes, as well as potential external grant funding opportunities.

- **Corporate Risk** – This project has considerable public interest and has been guided by a Stakeholder Engagement Plan. The preparation of the draft Master Plan was guided by two stages of consultation. Stage One consultation in October and November 2020 provided an early opportunity to share any issues or ideas regarding the precinct. Throughout the Stage One

consultation period 273 survey responses, 158 comments on the interactive map, and seven written submissions were received. Sixteen stakeholder meetings were also held, as well as an online community meeting with 10 participants. Based on Stage One feedback, preliminary sketch plans were developed and presented to key precinct property stakeholders and Councillors for consideration, as part of Stage Two consultation in February 2021. The Community Engagement section below outlines the consultation activities that occurred as part of public exhibition (Stage Three).

- **WHS and Public Risk** – Community and Stakeholder engagement activities complied with COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing requirements.

- **Environmental Risk** – The precinct includes several heritage items that have been considered in the draft Master Plan. The draft Master Plan also outlines several sustainability initiatives relating to water, energy, materials, and biodiversity. Implementation phases of the Master Plan may require further investigation on matters such as land contamination and Archaeological Assessment.

- **Delivery Program Risk** – The original project timeline anticipated exhibition of the draft Master Plan in March 2021. This timeframe was extended to May 2021 due to delays in the consultant being able to visit the site due to COVID-19 related border restrictions and to allow for additional stakeholder consultation activities. Overall, there was minimal delay, and the project was substantially completed within the 2020/21 financial year. This timing has allowed the Master Plan to be considered as part of the Albury Entertainment Centre Convention Wing Redevelopment design (currently being undertaken) and inform the overall Albury and Lavington CBD Master Plan reviews scheduled for 2021/22 and commencing shortly.

Community Engagement

Community and stakeholder input has been a key component in developing the Master Plan. A Stakeholder Engagement Plan has guided the various consultation methods and stages.

- Stage One: Have a Say (Community & Stakeholders) – Provided opportunity to share any issues or ideas and help develop a collective vision and key design principles guiding the precinct. (Completed in October – November 2020).
- Stage Two: Testing sketch plan (Key precinct property stakeholders) – Discussed the sketch Master Plan concepts and ideas with the key precinct property stakeholders. (Completed in February 2021).
- Stage Three: Exhibition (Community & Stakeholders) – Provided opportunity for feedback on the draft Master Plan and report. (Completed in May 2021).

The most recent engagement phase was public exhibition on the draft Master Plan. This included:

- public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days;
- public notice in the Border Mail newspaper;
- exhibition material placed on the AlburyCity website and available at the LibraryMuseum, Lavington Library and Council offices;

- notification via Council's social media;
- notification to participants of previous consultation rounds and community engagement mailing list;
- promotion via News from AlburyCity;
- two community drop-in session providing opportunity to view the draft plans and discuss with the Council project team members and design consultants; and
- meetings with various Precinct Property Stakeholders and Wiradjuri Elders Group.

The outcomes of the public exhibition are discussed above.

Future implementation phases of the draft Master Plan will also include further community and stakeholder consultation.

Options

1. Endorse the revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan (as per attachment 4), with all the recommended changes post-exhibition as outlined in attachment 2, or
2. Endorse the Cultural Precinct Master Plan, as previously exhibited without any changes post-exhibition, or
3. Endorse the Cultural Precinct Master Plan, with some of the recommended changes post-exhibition as outlined in attachment 2.
4. Not proceed with the Cultural Precinct Master Plan.

With consideration to the information outlined in this report, it is recommended that Council proceed with Option One.

Conclusion

Following three rounds of consultation, including consideration of the 44 submissions received during the formal exhibition period, endorsement is being sought on the revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan. Overall feedback from the community drop-in sessions and submissions received was generally supportive of the Master Plan.

The Cultural Precinct Master Plan provides an aspirational vision and long-term strategy for the Precinct, including public realm improvements for QEII Square and potential future opportunities for new building developments or renovations to enhance the Cultural Precinct as an integrated cultural campus and significant draw card for Albury, and a much-loved place for our community.

Recommendation

That Council:

a. Receives and note the submissions; and

b. Endorses the Cultural Precinct Master Plan as revised post-exhibition and included in attachment 4.

Attachments

1. Previous Council Report (excluding attachments) from 26 April 2021 (DOC21/94547).
2. Submissions Issues and Response Table (DOC21/156690).
3. Copy of emailed submissions (DOC21/156702).
4. Revised Cultural Precinct Master Plan (DOC21/156694).