

MyPlace Ashmore Community Survey 2017

Executive Summary



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Published by: City Futures Research Centre, UNSW Australia, March 2018

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Sincere thanks to Nicole McNamara for her assistance with this project.

This report is based on research undertaken with funding from the City of Sydney Council.

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Executive Summary

The Ashmore Precinct is one of the City of Sydney's largest urban development projects. The 17-hectare site is being developed over the next 10 years into a mixed-use precinct which will eventually house over 6,000 residents (COS 2017a). At the end of 2018, the Precinct will be half completed. The City of Sydney's Community Strategic Plan (COS 2017b) recognises that urban renewal sites such as the Ashmore Precinct provide the opportunity to make significant improvements to the improve the social, economic and environmental performance of the City and Sydney region.

The City of Sydney's vision for a socially sustainable city is a socially just and resilient city – a city for all. One of the major pillars of this vision is that “it is a city where people are socially connected and have a shared commitment to the wellbeing of their community” (COS 2016a:2). So that the City of Sydney can identify how it might best support communities' social wellbeing associated with environmental, economic and social changes, it is essential to collect information about the experiences and desires of residents and workers. This includes their satisfaction with, and feelings of attachment and belonging to, the places they live and work, the nature of their social interactions and social cohesion, and their plans and desires regarding their local areas. To this end, this report presents the results of a community survey of residents and workers in the Ashmore Precinct and the surrounding established area (henceforth the 'Ashmore Area'). The City intends for the survey to be undertaken on a recurring basis over coming years, to monitor changes to the social fabric over time as the urban renewal area develops.

Research aims

The study was undertaken by researchers at UNSW Sydney, with the assistance and support of the City of Sydney Council.

The aim of this research was to develop a survey tool for on-going assessment of social interactions and social cohesion at a large-scale urban renewal site that could be used to:

- » Measure the nature of social cohesion and social interaction and identify opportunities and barriers residents face in contributing to social cohesion and community development.
- » Understand the wellbeing of residents and workers, including their satisfaction with and attachment to the area, their local area preferences and desires, and their plans for the future.

Background

Urban renewal in brownfield areas is an important component of broader compact city policies in place in Sydney, around Australia, and elsewhere in the world. Local and state governments have an interest in understanding how well urban renewal areas are performing, including the satisfaction of residents and workers with these areas.

Understanding the satisfaction of residents and workers with these areas includes understanding resident and worker wellbeing, desires, patterns of facility and service use, social interaction and social cohesion. Social interaction is related to levels of neighbouring and refers to the nature and quality of interactions between people. Social cohesion is related to psychological sense of community and includes affective components of neighbourhood social life, including shared emotional connections, place attachment, membership, influence and sense of place.

Most neighbourhood studies on urban renewal areas have focused on the renewal of areas identified as disadvantaged, often in suburban areas, and less attention has been paid to urban renewal in brownfield sites, or to areas dominated by private medium and high density housing. There are few systematic post-occupancy studies of social outcomes of these areas, which make up a large component of urban growth in central and inner areas of cities. This is a significant gap in knowledge around planning for these very important growth areas.

Information collected in a tailored survey of social interaction and social cohesion in higher-density urban renewal sites, such as the survey presented in this report, can inform local land use planning, community development interventions, infrastructure investment and open space and public domain planning.

Survey development

The survey was designed as an on-going assessment tool for large-scale brownfield urban renewal sites dominated by private medium and high-density housing. The survey was initially designed for the Green Square renewal area, and then expanded to include the Ashmore Area because it is undergoing a similar process of urban renewal and community change. The survey focuses on the attitudes and behaviours of residents and workers. Information collected can be used to assess existing usage of services and facilities and to plan for new services and facilities provided by local council in regards to their influence on social interaction and social cohesion. The survey is also designed to provide information on the influence of other factors (beyond the provision of services and facilities by the City of Sydney) on social interaction and social cohesion, which can inform changes and improvements in other areas such as adapting design requirements, responding to social issues or concerns, and encouraging grass-roots initiatives.

The survey tool was developed from a comprehensive research process, which included a pilot survey. A full survey for the Green Square renewal area was run in 2014, and another (expanded to include the Ashmore Precinct) in 2017. The survey was amended between 2014 and 2017 in response to consultations undertaken with a wide range of City of Sydney staff, with the main change being a reduction in the number of questions asked.

In 2017, the City of Sydney funded City Futures Research Centre to undertake three consecutive surveys, every 2 years of the Ashmore Area (the Ashmore Precinct and surrounding streets) along with surrounding areas including the Green Square urban renewal area. Figure 1 in the main report shows the wider survey area. The ongoing research is funded through the City's Knowledge Exchange sponsorship program, which aims to encourage the exchange of ideas and knowledge, support the showcasing of local expertise and encourage dialogue on local and global issues (COS 2017c).

In total, 626 people completed the survey in the Ashmore Area, an area including the Ashmore Precinct and surrounding streets in the nearby established areas of Erskineville and Alexandria. The Ashmore survey therefore provides interesting insight into a new redevelopment area located within an established residential area. The survey respondents included 612 residents and 70 workers (56 people both lived and worked in the Ashmore Area). The body of this report presents the findings for residents. With a weighting for age applied (determined with reference to 2016 Census data on the population of the area), *the results for residents of Ashmore presented in this report can be understood as broadly representative of the total resident population of Ashmore, with a margin of error of around 4%.*

Key findings

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

Wellbeing of residents

- » The vast majority of residents (94%) agreed that the area was a good place to live, but fewer agreed that it was a good place to raise children (61%) or retire (39%).
- » The most commonly mentioned reasons for moving to the area were proximity to the Sydney CBD (72%), followed closely by lifestyle (67%) and proximity to public transport (66%).
- » Many (42%) of the residents who completed the survey had lived in the Ashmore Area for more than six years and a majority (78%) planned to remain living in the area for a number of years. As the majority of buildings in the Ashmore Precinct have been constructed over the past 2 years, this indicates that many of the survey respondents live in more established properties in the streets surrounding the new precinct.
- » The things people most commonly said they liked about living in the Ashmore Area were the proximity of the location to the CBD, convenience of the location, access to public transport, the café and restaurant culture, and the parks and green spaces in the area.
- » The things people most commonly said they disliked about living in the Ashmore Area related to transport and construction. These included concerns about traffic and insufficient parking, and construction impacts and density of development.
- » Related to the above two points, many of the things residents said would make the Ashmore Area the type of place they could like to live in the future related to transport management including: better public transport that connects to more areas of the city (44%), improved traffic management (42%), improved parking (33%) and safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists (25%). Many commonly desired improvements were economic, especially a wider variety of cafés, restaurants and bars (52%) and cultural improvements, such as more evening activities (e.g. night markets or open-air cinemas) (39%). Also important was public space, especially landscaping in streets and parks (37%).
- » Most Ashmore Area residents walk (67%) or drive (50%) to get to the supermarket or shops, and walk (61%), drive (31%) or take public transport (38%) to get to social, sport or recreational activities. The most common means of transport to work or study is public transport (57%) followed by driving (26%) and walking (20%). Of those residents that had dependent children, most people walk (56%) or drive (29%) to drop their children off at school or childcare.
- » Residents of the Ashmore Area were equally connected with the community at different geographical scales. More than half reported being strongly or very strongly connected to the building in which they live (57%), their street (54%), their suburb (61%), the inner-city and surrounds (51%), Sydney (55%) and Australia (53%). This compares to 74% of respondents across the City of Sydney being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with feeling part of their community overall (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015).
- » Almost half (45%) of the residents were satisfied with the level of social interaction they have with other people who live and work in the Ashmore Area, with the remainder wanting more interaction, including 15% of all survey respondents who had no interaction with other people in the area, but would like to have some. When these findings were broken down by dwelling type, with apartment residents used as a proxy for residents of the newer Ashmore Precinct area, 22% of apartment residents said that they had no interaction with people in the area but would like to have some, compared with 9% of residents living in other housing types. However, both figures are higher than that for Green Square (where 31% of all residents had no interaction and wanted some).

The nature of social interaction and social cohesion in the area

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- » While most people (98%) said they would help their neighbours, fewer (74%) thought their neighbours would help them. This compares to wider City of Sydney figures where 96% of people would be willing to help their neighbours 'definitely' or 'sometimes', and 62% felt they could get help 'definitely' or 'sometimes' (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015). Half of Ashmore Area residents (48%) borrowed things and exchanged favours with neighbours and 58% regularly stopped to talk with people in their neighbourhood.
- » The majority (82%) of resident survey respondents meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least weekly. A small minority (4%) meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues less than once a month.
- » The most common ways in which people had contact with other people while in Ashmore Area were socialising in cafés, restaurants and/or pubs (75%) and chatting to people on the street (69%). Socialising in their own and/or other's homes (64%), chatting to people while shopping (50%) and socialising in parks (50%) were also important.
- » Incidental interaction (running into people you know) was most likely to occur at a café, restaurant or pub (77%), on local streets (75%), at local shops (75%) or in local parks (65%).
- » Many residents said that most of their friends were of a similar age (77%) and educational background (69%) and over half (55%) said that they were of the same ethnic background. The figures for age and education are similar to national figures collected in the Australian General Social Survey (2010) (when this question was last asked), but a smaller proportion of respondents said that their friends were of a similar ethnic background than the national average, suggesting that friendship groups amongst Ashmore residents are more ethnically mixed than for the Australian population as a whole.
- » Most Ashmore residents had not been involved in formal civic activities such as volunteering (15%), or participating in clubs and associations (17%) *over the past month*. Figures for wider City of Sydney are 50% and 89% respectively, though *over the past year* (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015). However, over the past year, 57% of Ashmore residents had signed a petition, 38% had previously taken part in another research project, 29% had participated in an online discussion, and 24% met with, called or sent a letter to a local politician. Wider City of Sydney figures for "meeting, calling or writing to a local politician" in the past year are 4.6% (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015).
- » Two-fifths of Ashmore residents thought that they understood their rights around urban development and planning for the local area (40%). Related to this, one-third of residents felt that their thoughts about local issues in the Ashmore Area could be heard by people who make a difference (36%)¹, and that there was strong local leadership in the area (35%). However, a smaller percentage felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area (28%) or contributing to shaping the local area (22%).

¹ Compare to City of Sydney Residents Survey, 2015, where 44% of residents agreed that "There are enough opportunities to have a say on issues that are important to you"

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- » Of the reliable responses (n=304-307) to the question on safety², the majority of residents felt safe or unconcerned in all situations, with residents feeling safest at home alone during the day (in which circumstance 100% of people felt safe or unconcerned), and least safe when walking in Ashmore alone after dark (13% unsafe or not at all safe). This compares to 98% feeling (very) safe or neutral at home during the day, and 23% feeling (very) unsafe walking in the local area after dark in the wider City of Sydney area (City of Sydney Residents Survey 2015).

Opportunities and barriers residents face in contributing to social cohesion and community development

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- » The services and facilities in the Ashmore Area most commonly used by residents were local cafés and restaurants (96%), local parks (87%), local pubs, bars or clubs (85%) and regional parks (83%). The use of community or neighbourhood centres was much lower (16%). This may potentially reflect the absence of community centres in the Ashmore Area, and is comparable with the proportion of Green Square residents who use these types of facilities (13%). The significant community facilities currently under construction in Green Square will serve both Ashmore area and Green Square residents in the future.
- » The most common limitation people experience to socialising with others in the area is time constraints (51% often or all of the time). Other important limitations are not being interested (17% often or all of the time), difficulty in finding information about social activities (16% often or all of the time), and financial reasons (12% often or all of the time).
- » People would like to get information about opportunities to participate in social activities in the Ashmore Area from social media (67%), emailed community newsletters (53%), websites (47%), and noticeboards (41%).

Implications for practice

The results of the survey were presented to staff across the City of Sydney Council. It is expected that the survey findings will be used to inform Council's investments and activities across a range of areas, including community development, civic engagement, communications, place making, land use planning, open space and public domain planning, and local business development. The implications for practice presented here are preliminary and it is expected that City staff will further analyse and apply the survey findings to inform their work going forward.

Implications for community development

A higher proportion of residents of the Ashmore Area (45%) were satisfied with the level of social interaction they have than were residents of neighbouring Green Square (31%) who completed the survey. This may be explained by the higher proportion of Ashmore Area residents who had lived in the area for six or more years who completed the survey and who lived in the more established streets surrounding the Ashmore Precinct rather than in the Precinct itself. However, already 55% of Ashmore Area residents want more social interaction than they currently have and as more new residents move into the area as housing units are completed, the current level of satisfaction with social interaction may decline. Interventions to encourage social interaction will be needed that engage residents, many of whom demonstrated a desire for greater

² Unfortunately, this question was asked in such a way in the online survey that the results cannot be relied upon. Subsequently results are presented here only from completed hardcopies of the survey.

involvement in social interactions, but are constrained because of a lack of time and/or knowledge about the opportunities available to them.

Implications for civic engagement

While 40% of residents understand their rights around planning and urban development in the local area, a smaller percentage felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area or contributing to shaping the area. There is potential for improved engagement amongst residents in the area as demonstrated by their willingness to be engaged in political discussions, demonstrated by the proportions of residents who had participated in other research, signed petitions, participated in online discussions and contacted politicians.

Implications for communications

Aside from time constraints and not being interested, difficulty in finding information about social activities was also a limitation given by some residents to socialising with others in the area. Residents would most like to receive this type of information through social media, e-mail, websites and noticeboards. There may be potential for the City to provide such information not only through City-specific social media, but also through partnering with other social media platforms known to be actively used in the area.

Implications for place making

In comparison to respondents to the Green Square Survey, who felt more strongly connected to Australia, Sydney and the inner city and surrounds than to their local area, street or building; respondents to the survey in Ashmore felt equally strongly connected to the suburb in which they live, their building and their street as they do to the inner city, Sydney or Australia. This suggests a strong local connection to place amongst residents and points to a need to acknowledge and support existing place attachments of local residents as the area continues to change rapidly.

Implications for land use planning

The things people most commonly said they disliked about the area included heavy traffic and concerns about parking. Commonly mentioned improvements residents wanted included those related to traffic management, better public transport that connects to more parts of the city, improved parking and safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Pressure on roads and transport is area of discontent amongst many residents, and indicates an important ongoing role for the City in continuing to liaise with relevant state transport and roads authorities to try to manage these issues, alongside the City's own land use planning controls.

Implications for open space, public domain and community facility planning

Parks and public spaces are significant locations for social interaction in the Ashmore Area and heavily used by residents. This could influence local land use planning and infrastructure development in the Ashmore Area and in future urban renewal areas, as it suggests that parks are more commonly used places for facilitating local social interaction than formal community spaces such as community centres. Two parks – Kooka Walk and McPherson parks – are planned for the Ashmore Precinct and will be delivered in the Greenland development providing over 15,000 sqm of open space within the Ashmore Area. However, it should be recognised that the figures for use of formal community facilities may be influenced by the absence of such facilities in the area. It should also be noted that formal facilities also afford different types of social interaction than parks.

Implications for local business

Many people socialise with others in the Ashmore Area in cafes, restaurants and/or pubs and incidental interaction is also common in these places and at local shops. Cafes and restaurants are also commonly used services and facilities. Such businesses are therefore playing an important social role in the area, and half of the Ashmore Area residents said that they would like to see a wider variety of cafes, restaurants and bars in the area in the future. This suggests that the ideal of mixed-use development encouraging greater social interaction is supported by the findings in this case and this has implications for development application planners who are making decisions about new businesses in the area. A supermarket and associated retail (including cafes) is planned as part of the Greenland development in the Ashmore Precinct
