

# Macquarie Street East

## PRECINCT REVIEW

03 01 2021



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The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP  
Premier of New South Wales  
GPO Box 5341  
Sydney NSW 2001

The Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP  
Treasurer of New South Wales  
GPO Box 5341  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Premier and Treasurer

## **REVIEW OF THE MACQUARIE STREET EAST PRECINCT**

We are pleased to present a detailed report on the long-term vision for the historic Macquarie Street East (MSE) precinct, as requested in November 2018. The MSE precinct review has been supported by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Government Architect.

Macquarie Street houses some of the state's most significant cultural and historic buildings and forms the civic spine of Sydney. It has been home to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation for tens of thousands of years. More recently, it is the place where Australia, Sydney and NSW's post-1788 civic and political journey began.

The civic and cultural importance of the precinct is reflected in the location of Parliament House and the major cluster of nationally significant cultural institutions which includes (from north to south) the Sydney Opera House, the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney and Domain, State Library of NSW, Art Gallery of NSW, the Mint, Hyde Park Barracks, Registrar General's Building and St James' Church. To the south is Hyde Park, and along College Street is St Mary's Cathedral and the Australian Museum.

Currently the MSE precinct presents as a collection of buildings lacking a unifying narrative. This has resulted in a poor-quality public realm that adds little to no value to the institutions, singularly or collectively, to give them the recognition they deserve.

This review has considered opportunities to use heritage and cultural assets to enhance cultural offerings in the precinct, support the night-time economy, encourage visitation from tourists and locals alike, and improve the quality of the public realm, drawing on inspiration from international best practice.

The panel believes that work to realise the vision in this report must start in start now, to maximise the opportunities offered by the new Sydney Metro station at Martin Place and the new Sydney Modern. By 2022, Sydney Modern will be open to visitors, offering more than double the exhibition and display space currently available at the Art Gallery of NSW. Then in 2024, the Sydney Metro will be fully operational and there are expected to be more than 200,000 trips per day through the Martin Place station by the early 2030s. These two milestones present the MSE precinct with an opportunity and a challenge to be a permeable, accessible and lively precinct that allows people to travel from Martin Place to the Art Gallery of NSW and Sydney Modern – and attracts them to linger and enjoy the cultural offerings, day and night.

Starting work now will also lay the groundwork for longer term projects to improve and enliven this area, in preparation for the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet on 26 January 1788. We acknowledge that 26 January is a contested date for many Australians. However, we are optimistic that by 2038, Australians will have agreed on a pathway to recognition of Aboriginal people in our Constitution, and that the celebration at MSE of our shared history will be part of a genuine healing process.

We commend this report to you for consideration.

Yours sincerely,



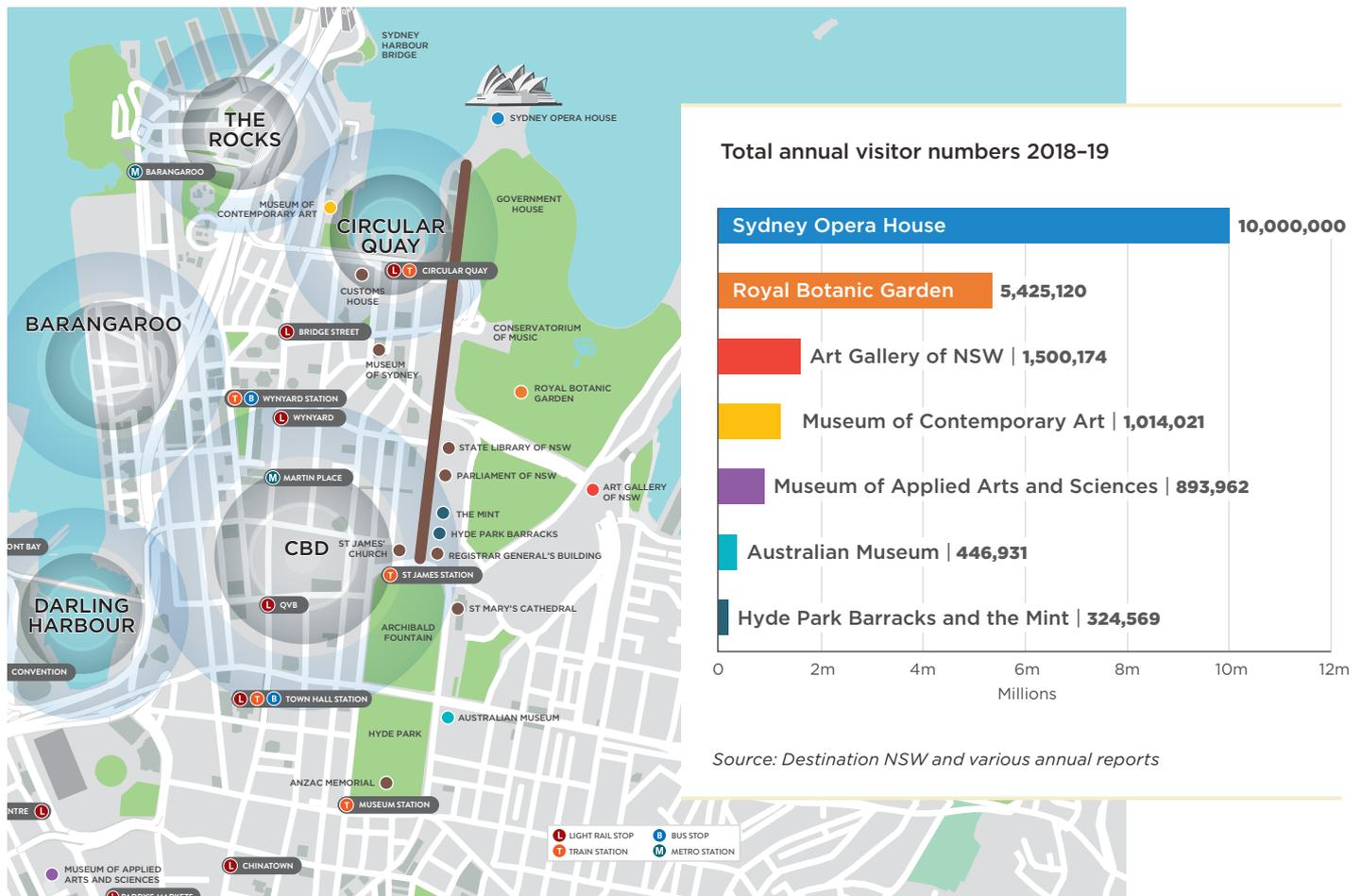
**The Hon. Paul Keating**



**Lucy Turnbull AO**

# Executive summary

The Macquarie Street East (MSE) precinct is the civic and cultural spine of Sydney, home to, and surrounded by Sydney's major civic and cultural institutions and historic buildings. The precinct represents an important intersection of Aboriginal, colonial and 20th century NSW political, social and cultural history, and has developed into the political centre of NSW.



Despite its importance and location, MSE is largely overlooked due to low connectivity within and through the precinct, as well as a lack of recognition of culture and heritage, effective placemaking and wayfinding, and a coordinated precinct vision and management. MSE experiences far lower levels of footfall than other Sydney attractions but has the characteristics to transform into a vibrant and active visitor destination and celebration of the state's diverse past, present and future.

Recognising the potential of the precinct and the heritage value of the buildings within it, the review has focused on:

- identifying solutions to renew MSE without undermining its existing character
- celebrating and preserving its Aboriginal cultural and civic significance
- considering opportunities to use heritage and cultural assets to improve the attractiveness and liveliness of the precinct
- encouraging more activities after 5pm to enliven the precinct
- improving the quality of the public realm.

The review has taken inspiration from acclaimed international precincts, including Exhibition Road in London and Museum Mile in New York City.



## Recommendations

The panel offers the following recommendations to provide a framework to guide future decisions and investments and leverage existing assets and the strategic location of the precinct.

The 250th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet to Sydney in 2038 provides an ideal completion date for a program of work to renew the precinct and commemorate this significant milestone. Planning, phasing and sequencing of improvements of this scale should begin now, and initially focus on the southern end of the precinct.

- 1. Adopt a unified vision** for the precinct to create a world-class cultural destination comparable to Exhibition Road (London) and Museum Mile (NYC).
- 2. Strengthen recognition** of the precinct's significance to NSW's political, cultural and social history.
- 3. Create a new cultural precinct** with a great public realm that attracts visitors around the clock.
- 4. Repurpose the Registrar General's Building** as a new cultural institution focused on the decorative and applied arts, to be programmed collaboratively with other NSW cultural institutions to harness the synergies between their collections and exhibitions, and to create a culturally rich, integrated and unified public realm from the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks to the Domain.
- 5. Identify spaces within the precinct** to showcase and celebrate Sydney's 60,000-year history.
- 6. Explore options for the Chief Secretary's Building.**
  - 6a. Paul Keating recommends** returning the Chief Secretary's Building to its original purpose as the office of the Premier and Cabinet, and does not support commercial uses.
  - 6b. Lucy Turnbull recommends** that if it is not practicable for the Chief Secretary's Building to be used as the Premier's and/or Treasurer's offices, then other government, administrative or cultural uses should be investigated. If these are not found to be practicable either, commercial uses that maintain ongoing or regular public access should be explored.
- 7. Improve permeability and wayfinding** throughout the precinct and prioritise an improved link from Martin Place to the Domain, through the Sydney Hospital site.
- 8. Enhance safety and amenity.**
- 9. Relocate agency tenants** to facilitate the vision and investigate opportunities for precinct management.

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# Introduction

The MSE precinct is one of the jewels in Sydney's glittering crown, and home to some of the city's most important public buildings and iconic open spaces, forming the civic and cultural spine of Sydney. Areas surrounding the precinct also hold great cultural and historical significance.

In November 2018, the NSW Government requested the panel to consider the future of this important public area and provide recommendations to enliven and improve the MSE precinct. The terms of reference required the review to consider:

- a vision and priorities for an expanded MSE precinct that elevate its importance as a significant place in the heart of a globally connected city, and celebrate its cultural heritage
- opportunities to improve connectivity, accessibility and permeability to and throughout the precinct, and integrate with surrounding places

- how to implement opportunities for renewal within the precinct, including appropriate governance to ensure coordinated management of the precinct.

The review has been completed with the aim of developing a long-term vision for MSE to enhance the precinct's cultural offerings and provide additional opportunities for visitors, businesses and residents. Building upon existing civic institutions, the review's recommendations highlight opportunities for improving accessibility, utilisation and recognition of MSE's historical, cultural and civic significance.

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## The precinct

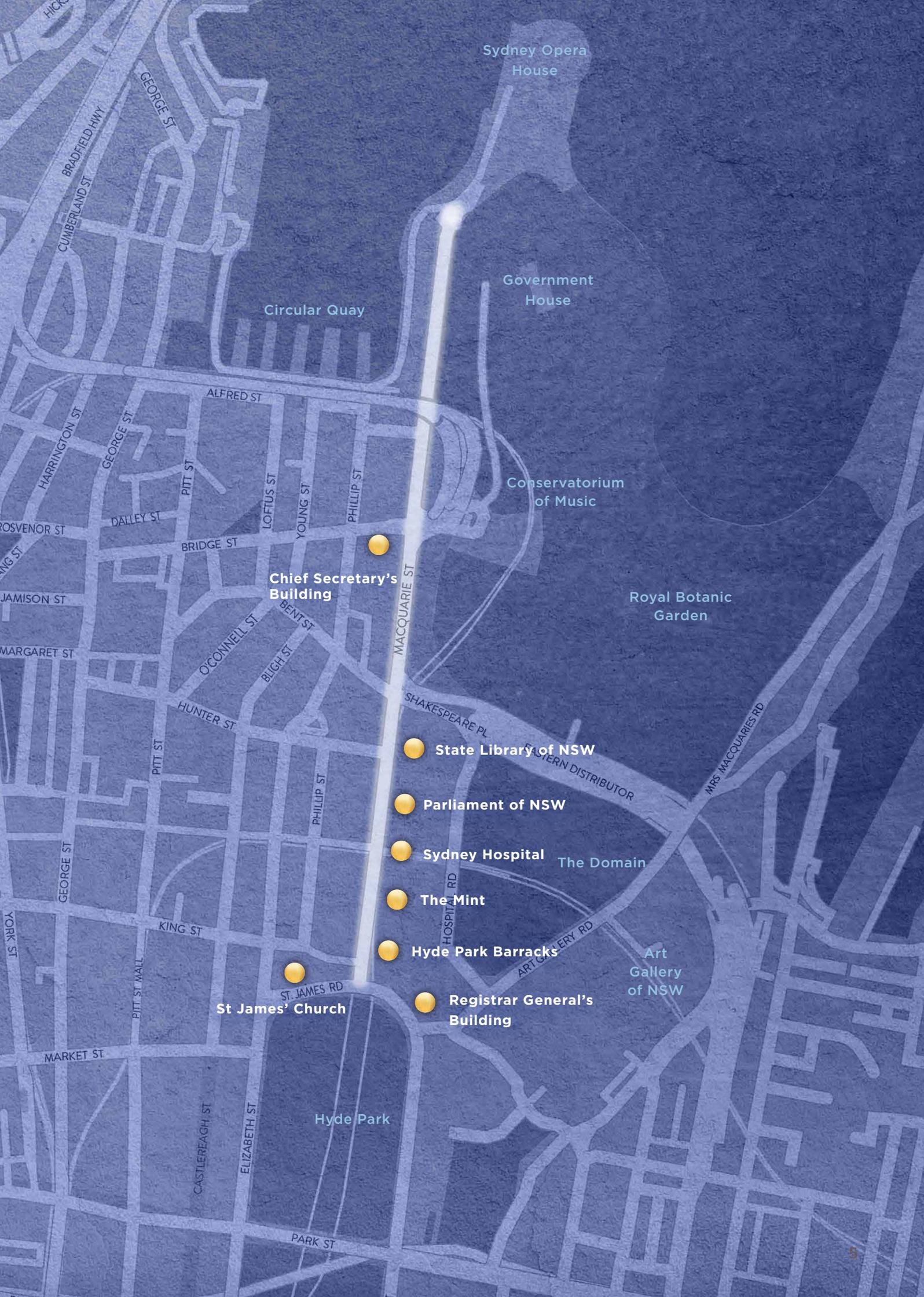
The wider Macquarie Street precinct runs from the Sydney Opera House to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney and Domain, to the Art Gallery of NSW, Hyde Park and the Australian Museum.

The focus of this review is the MSE precinct, defined as the cultural, heritage and civic precinct situated on the eastern boundary of Macquarie Street, bordered by the Sydney Opera House to the north, the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney to the northeast, the Domain to the east and Hyde Park to the south. On the western flank of the precinct is Martin Place, Australia's pre-eminent financial and commercial district, which provides a direct pedestrianised link to George Street and Sydney's Central Business District (CBD). More than 700,000 people work in the Sydney CBD and when the Sydney Metro opens in 2024, visitation to Martin Place will increase significantly.

While the focus of this review has been the MSE precinct, the panel recognises that the precinct's

potential area of influence is far broader and so has considered the wider opportunities and benefits of renewing and revitalising MSE to adjoining institutions, and opportunities for those working, living in and visiting the CBD.

The MSE precinct has been the subject of various studies over several years. These provide a strong foundation from which to develop an integrated precinct vision and suggest key steps for successful implementation. The panel also considered government strategic plans and policies in forming its recommendations. A summary of these plans and strategies are set out in [Appendix A](#).



Sydney Opera House

Government House

Circular Quay

Conservatorium of Music

Royal Botanic Garden

Chief Secretary's Building

State Library of NSW

Parliament of NSW

Sydney Hospital

The Domain

The Mint

Hyde Park Barracks

Art Gallery of NSW

St James' Church

Registrar General's Building

Hyde Park

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# Context

## A culmination of the state's Aboriginal, cultural and political history

Macquarie Street represents an important and unique intersection of Aboriginal, colonial and 20th century NSW history – political, social and cultural.

The Gadigal people of the Eora nation are the traditional custodians of the land on which Macquarie Street was constructed.<sup>1</sup> For thousands of years, before contact with the Berewalgal (people from a distant place: the Europeans), the Gadigal people inhabited the shoreline of Sydney Harbour, from the Heads along the southern shore to Warrane (the Gadigal name for Sydney Cove) and beyond.

Reflecting the important role of this area in Aboriginal history, the *Barani Barrabugu* publication has identified more than 60 sites of significance associated with the histories of Aboriginal people across the City of Sydney local government area. Recent scholarship suggests that Hyde Park north was the site of a 'fighting ground' for staging combative trials, first by the Aboriginal people between their own clans and later in demonstrating their fighting prowess against the British.<sup>2</sup>



Following settlement of the first Europeans in Sydney, and prior to the arrival of Governor Lachlan Macquarie at the end of 1810, Macquarie Street was a bush track serving as the eastern boundary of town. Upon his arrival, Governor Macquarie set aside land on the western edge of the Government Domain for a new hospital, and established a new road, Macquarie Street. He also proclaimed Hyde Park.

In 1817 the Rum Hospital was established, and a year later so was Hyde Park Barracks, immediately to the south. The Government Stables (now the Sydney Conservatorium of Music) was established shortly before Governor Macquarie's term ended in 1819.<sup>3</sup>

Following the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1824, the northern wing of the Rum Hospital became the Parliament of NSW in 1829. In 1856 the British government created representative government in NSW and the Legislative Assembly was then established.

The Rum Hospital also represented the rising influence of women at the time. It was home to Australia's first nursing school, which was opened in 1868 by Lucy Osburn, a student and colleague of Florence Nightingale. The Rum Hospital (now the Mint) remains the oldest building on Macquarie Street and the oldest public building in the City of Sydney.

While the precinct became the civic spine of Sydney, its links to recent Aboriginal history, both positive and negative, cannot be overlooked. As identified in the *Barani Barrabugu* publication, the Chief Secretary's Building, completed in 1880, was the meeting place of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Prior to its abolition in 1969, the board was given statutory powers to assume full control and custody of Aboriginal children, ultimately creating the legal framework for the Stolen Generations. The building is a reminder of the atrocities overcome by the traditional custodians of NSW.

In contrast, the Domain is a site of Aboriginal peoples' civil and political empowerment. The Domain is where Jack Patten, co-founder of the Aborigines Progressive Association, spoke about Aboriginal peoples' rights every Sunday afternoon.

Today, the MSE precinct and surrounding area has developed into the political centre of NSW. The hospital's operations continue, while the rest of the street hosts numerous public institutions including the

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1. [www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-people-and-place/](http://www.sydneybarani.com.au/sites/aboriginal-people-and-place/)

2. [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5053512](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5053512)

3. [www.visitsydneyaustralia.com.au/macquarie-street.html](http://www.visitsydneyaustralia.com.au/macquarie-street.html)

Parliament of NSW, Supreme Court of NSW, Reserve Bank of Australia and Land Titles Office. Hyde Park Barracks and the Mint have been converted into Sydney Living Museums, displaying collections from

the colonial and convict eras, and include function spaces and office premises. Further information on the current functions of the buildings are available from page 8 of the report.



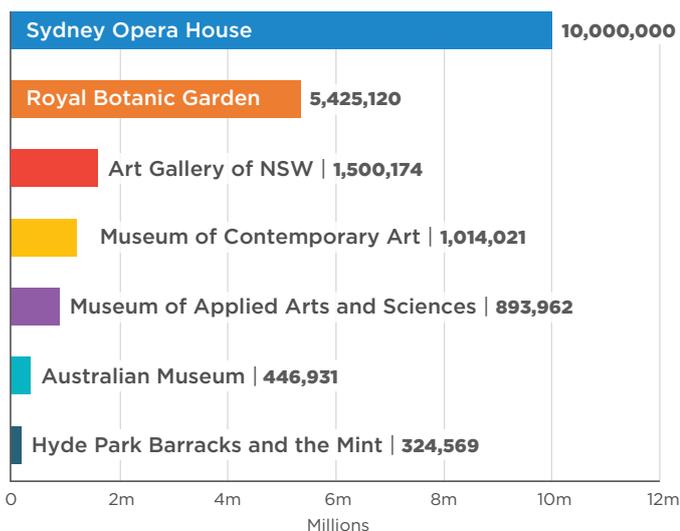
### Significance of the visitor economy in the wider Macquarie Street precinct

In 2018–2019 NSW achieved its highest ever volume of total visitors, nights and expenditure, with total visitor overnight and day trip expenditure amounting to \$41.5 billion, and with Sydney continuing to lead all Australian capital cities in both the domestic and international overnight markets.<sup>4</sup> This is in part due to globally significant attractions including Circular Quay, the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney and the Sydney Opera House (see table below).

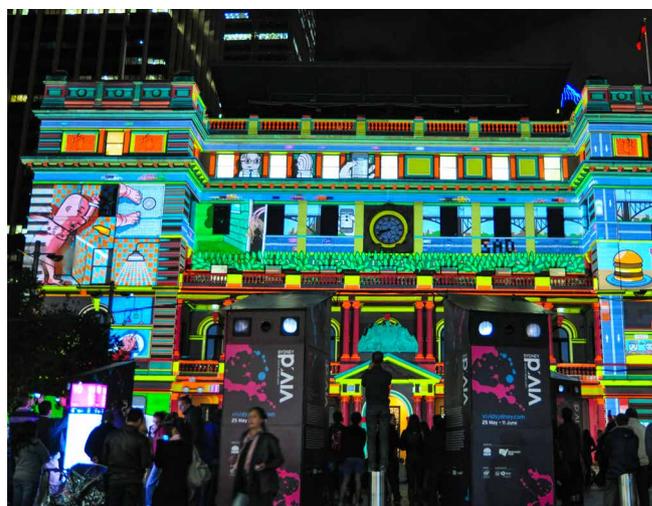
In comparison, annual visitation to some of the most well-known attractions within the precinct, such as the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks, is significantly lower.

Although official visitation is low, Macquarie Street is a well trafficked thoroughfare, particularly during business hours.<sup>5</sup> However, nowhere in the precinct is frequented in the evenings or on weekends, outside of the periods when events such as Vivid and the Sydney Festival are on. Parts of the precinct and its surrounds are activated through major events like Vivid, which attracted 2.4 million visitors in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Hyde Park and the Domain also regularly host major events and festivals.

Total annual visitor numbers 2018-19



Source: Destination NSW and various annual reports



4. [www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Destination-NSW-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf](http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Destination-NSW-Annual-Report-2018-2019.pdf)  
 5. [www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/143964/PublicSpacesPublicLifeSydney2007\\_final\\_Part2.PDF](http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/143964/PublicSpacesPublicLifeSydney2007_final_Part2.PDF)  
 6. <http://destinationnsw.staging.2dm.digital/news-and-media/media-releases/vivid-sydney-2019-breaks-all-records-for-visitation#:~:text=Vivid%20Sydney%202019%20has%20broken,ideas%20in%20the%20Southern%20Hemisphere.>

## Home to, and surrounded by, Sydney's major cultural and civic institutions

The MSE precinct forms a civic and cultural spine of the city, containing some of Australia's most significant institutions. These include the Parliament of NSW, State Library of NSW, the Registrar General's Building (Land Titles Office) and Sydney Hospital, as well as Hyde Park Barracks and the Mint. The history of the buildings within the MSE precinct is detailed below.



### Sydney Hospital

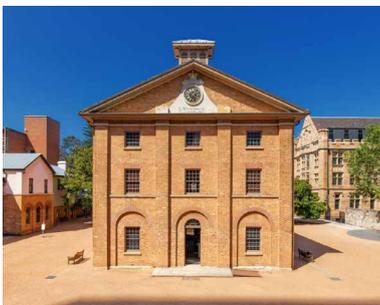
Between 1816 and 1848, the General Hospital provided medical care for the colony's convict workforce. Driven by its location in the centre of Sydney, the hospital buildings have attracted interest for various other government uses over the years. By 1842 the north wing was completely turned over for use by the NSW Legislative Council. In 1854, after convict transportation to NSW had ended and gold had been discovered in NSW, the south wing was converted into the first overseas branch of the Royal Mint in London.<sup>7</sup> Today, the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District owns and manages the hospital building, operating it as the Sydney Eye Hospital.



### The Mint

The Sydney Royal Mint was opened for business in 1855. The south wing of the original Rum Hospital was converted into offices for receiving gold, while new buildings to the rear contained a factory for processing gold into coins. All deliveries of gold passed through the decorative stained-glass doors facing Macquarie Street.

In 1997 the site was transferred to the Historic Houses Trust, now called Sydney Living Museums. A major conservation and redevelopment project was undertaken in 2005, integrating contemporary architecture with carefully conserved historic building elements and archaeological remains. The old mint buildings were converted into modern offices, the Caroline Simpson Library and function spaces.



### Hyde Park Barracks

The Hyde Park Barracks is a UNESCO World Heritage site in the historic heart of Sydney. Built to house - and control - male convicts, the barracks had far-reaching impact as the administrative hub of the colony's convict system. After 1848 it sheltered immigrant girls and young women, as well as older, sick and poor women. Drawing together key threads of convict life, Aboriginal peoples' resilience and free immigration, the story of the barracks is the story of Australia's modern beginnings. Following transfer of ownership to Sydney Living Museums, the Hyde Park Barracks still comprises one of the most significant archaeological collections in Australia and is a unique archive of 19th century textiles and institutional life. The barracks is currently closed as the museum embarks on a bold renewal project to tell a significant part of Australia's convict story - its impact on First Nations people.



### Chief Secretary's Building

Completed in 1881, the Chief Secretary's Building is, by design, a symbol of power and politics. The building served as the seat of government administration for 120 years, and following a refurbishment, now houses a variety of short-term tenants. Heritage-listed as a building of both state and national cultural significance, it falls within a group of early buildings on Macquarie Street collectively called 'a poem in stone'.

7. <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/what-was-rum-hospital>



### **State Library of NSW**

The State Library of NSW is the oldest library in Australia, and the first public library in NSW. Prior to its acquisition by the NSW Government in 1869 it had operated as the Australian Subscription Library since 1826. Its renowned historical and contemporary collections, comprising more than six million items, document the heritage of Australia and Oceania and are some of the state's most valuable assets. In recent years, the library attracted private investments of over \$15 million for a complete transformation of its heritage-listed Mitchell Building. The renovated space opened in October 2018, which reinvigorated the cultural icon and returned more than 1,500 square metres of previously inaccessible space to the public.



### **Parliament of NSW**

The Parliament of NSW is Australia's first and oldest parliament and remains operational today. It was rebuilt and refurbished in the 1980s and houses a significant artwork collection. The building is accessible from both Macquarie Street and Hospital Road, and due to its use is subject to strict security requirements. It is now managed by the Corporation of the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of NSW and continues to house both chambers of the NSW Parliament. In recent years, it has expanded its services and now provides dining facilities and function spaces.



### **Registrar General's Building**

The Land Titles Office replaced the 1860 Registrar General's Office in Elizabeth Street. The building was constructed as part of a proposed 'legal precinct', which included new law courts on the site of the Mint and a new road through the Hyde Park Barracks. Since the early 20th century, the building has been a repository for public records, including records of births, deaths, marriages and land titles. The building is significant as an important design of the Government Architect's Office in the early 20th century. It is regarded as an important example of the work of Government Architect WL Vernon, who also designed the Art Gallery of NSW, State Library of NSW and the Chief Secretary's Building. Property NSW now owns the building and leases sections out to agencies including Land Registry Services, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Transport for NSW and Service NSW for use as office space.



### **St James' Church**

Consecrated by the Reverend Samuel Marsden in 1824, St James' Church is Sydney's oldest surviving church, hosting services continuously for 192 years. Facing Hyde Park Barracks, St James' was also designed by the colony's first Civil Architect, Francis Greenway. Originally the church was intended as a courthouse and therefore has more civic than ecclesiastical proportions, with a sandstone base and brickwork facade supporting a gabled slate roof. The crypt beneath the church houses the Children's Chapel with its low, barrel-vaulted ceiling and 1929 murals by the Turramurra Painters, which reinterpret the popular Christmas carol 'I saw three ships' in a Sydney Harbour setting.

## Heritage status

The heritage value of Macquarie Street is recognised through the heritage listing of several sites. Various sites within the precinct are represented on the National Heritage List, Commonwealth Heritage List, NSW State Heritage Register and Register of the National Estate. The Hyde Park Barracks is also registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List as it has preserved unique evidence of Australian convict history. Within the wider MSE precinct, sites of Aboriginal significance have also been identified.

These listings, with the advice of heritage experts, have informed the recommendations of the report to ensure that any new proposals do not endanger the rich heritage value of the precinct. As several of the institutions feature less prominently with only specific elements of aesthetic value, there is opportunity to modify the buildings with sympathetic consideration of their significance.





Sydney Opera House

Government House

Circular Quay



Chief Secretary's Building

Conservatorium of Music

Royal Botanic Garden



State Library of NSW



Sydney Hospital



Parliament of NSW



The Mint

The Domain



Art Gallery of NSW

Hyde Park Barracks

St James' Church



Registrar General's Building



Hyde Park



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# Approach

This review has identified and prioritised new opportunities to create a lively precinct that better leverages existing cultural assets, and to improve the space. Recognising the potential of the precinct and heritage value of the buildings within it, the review has focused on identifying solutions to renew MSE without undermining its existing character.

To inform the review, the panel has considered:

- the historical, civic, cultural and social significance of the precinct at a local and national level
- a survey of the high-value assets already within the precinct boundaries
- the strategic priorities of the NSW Government
- issues preventing the precinct from realising its potential.

The recommendations are intended to provide a framework to help guide future decisions and investments to leverage existing assets and the strategic location of the precinct, such as:

- using heritage and cultural assets to improve the attractiveness and liveliness of the precinct
- encouraging more activities after 5pm to enliven the precinct
- improving the quality of the public realm.

In respecting the existing institutions and their functions, the panel held consultations with relevant stakeholders. This included the Department of Premier and Cabinet; representatives of Create NSW and the cultural institutions within the MSE Precinct; Transport for NSW and Sydney Metro; the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment; and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.



# Findings

The MSE precinct is largely overlooked by visitors due to several factors including a lack of effective placemaking and wayfinding, recognition of culture and heritage, and coordinated precinct vision and management. This review has focused on three essential foundations of successful heritage precincts, which are outlined below. Using these foundations, 11 key findings have been identified to demonstrate the area's most pressing shortcomings.



## Culture and heritage

- Celebrate the history of Sydney's civic spine
- Create opportunities for reparation and healing with NSW's First Peoples
- Commemorate the significant cultural influences throughout the precinct

## Placemaking and public realm

- Create an attractive and lively round-the-clock destination
- Promote at night to support an engaging night-time economy

## Vision and precinct management

- Develop a unified vision to direct precinct activities

## Findings snapshot

### # Key finding

#### 1 Culture and heritage

- 1.1 There is a lack of recognition of the heritage and historical significance of the precinct including Aboriginal custodianship and history before and after 1788
- 1.2 The precinct requires more cultural activity at the southern end, such as a decorative and applied arts museum, to leverage existing cultural infrastructure and institutions, and to create a lively, dynamic and attractive destination day and night. (For example, this museum could deliver major blockbuster shows programmed in partnership by the Powerhouse Museum, the Art Gallery of NSW and State Library of NSW, harnessing synergies between their collections. Consideration should be given to the opportunities for philanthropic contributions to a decorative and applied arts museum's foundation, collection and operation)

#### 2 Placemaking and the public realm

- 2.1 The precinct as a whole lacks its own identity, has lower levels of visitation than other Sydney precincts and lacks vibrancy, but could be a great urban canvas for the night-time economy
- 2.2 There is limited public use of spaces and buildings
- 2.3 The quality of the public realm is poor and inconsistent
- 2.4 The precinct is broadly accessible but has been unable to capitalise on its location on the edge of the CBD, Domain, Art Gallery of NSW and Registrar General's Building as a lively and interesting place
- 2.5 The precinct's connectivity with the surrounding CBD is variable to poor, which limits its liveliness
- 2.6 The poor wayfinding and current configuration of buildings, pathways and entrances limits permeability and walkability
- 2.7 The current usage of Hospital Road diminishes the public realm and acts as a barrier between the MSE precinct and the Domain
- 2.8 The lack of openness and connectivity in the southern half of the MSE precinct is a key reason for low levels of visitation and footfall. The precinct presents major opportunities for improvement.

#### 3 Vision and precinct management

- 3.1 Asset owners and occupants have varying interests and priorities

## Culture and heritage

**Art and culture are instrumental in creating vibrant, socially connected places that contribute to retaining and developing local identity and supporting transitions in an ever-changing urban environment.<sup>8</sup>**

There is also increasing evidence that arts and culture make a positive contribution to the liveability, dynamism and attractiveness of a city or region, specifically to its competitive advantage. In particular, cultural infrastructure and experience supports Sydney's strategic positioning as an international centre for innovation and a cultural tourism destination. This will be magnified with the expansion of the Art Gallery of NSW in 2022.

Heritage brings a richness to the shared experience of the community and strengthens our culture and understanding of where we have come from.<sup>9</sup> History is embedded in places and buildings. Interpreting and celebrating heritage leads to a better understanding of history and responds to the experiences of diverse communities.

Successful cultural precincts directly support a range of artistic, economic and commercial activities, including locally generated arts enterprises and creative businesses, an evening 'food and beverage' economy, and content 'imported' from outside the local area.

Due to their identity and ability to attract high visitation, anchor institutions are critical to the success of a cultural precinct. Cultural institutions in particular play a pivotal role in the conservation and revitalisation of heritage, and in facilitating citizens' understanding of history and culture.<sup>10</sup>

8. [https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206\\_CIP2025.pdf](https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206_CIP2025.pdf)

9. [www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/design-guides/better-placed-design-guide-for-heritage-2019-01-30.pdf](http://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/design-guides/better-placed-design-guide-for-heritage-2019-01-30.pdf)

10. <https://resources.riches-project.eu/glossary/cultural-institutions/>

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**Key finding 1.1: there is a lack of recognition of the heritage and historical significance of the precinct including Aboriginal custodianship and history before and after 1788**

Despite being an important and unique culmination of the state's Aboriginal, cultural and political history, the precinct does not convey or celebrate its historical character in a consistent way to evoke a sense of pride and spark wonder. Most strikingly, there is a complete lack of representation of Aboriginal history in the public art along Macquarie Street. The precinct's major buildings and institutions have limited connections with Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal people that lived in the Sydney basin for thousands of years before European settlement. This deficiency is clearly evident in the public commemoration of Matthew Flinders and his cat outside the State Library in Macquarie Street. Absent from memorial is recognition of Bungaree, the man Governor Macquarie named the 'King of the Broken Bay Aborigines' who accompanied Flinders on a coastal survey voyage to Bribie Island and Hervey Bay. Bungaree became the first Aboriginal person to circumnavigate Australia. This lack of recognition diminishes the significance of the land to Aboriginal peoples and makes their achievements completely invisible. The precinct also makes limited reference to the role of women in the history of the area and NSW, such as Caroline Chisholm, who helped find work for the immigrant women housed in Hyde Park Barracks.

The precinct lacks an engaging space that celebrates Sydney's 60,000-year history. There is no single place that presents historical moments in Sydney's evolution from the Eora people, via a colonial city, through to the global metropolis it has become today.

Additionally, there is very little accompanying information about what public sculptures can be explored. There are also limited plaques to inform walking tour guides, cultural events or visitors, and increase knowledge of the precinct as a whole, or of its components.

While there are some signs for historical attractions including the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks, they are not easy to identify or consistent across the precinct, and there are limited physical and visual cues or markers to recognise the heritage significance of some of the buildings.

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**Key finding 1.2: the precinct requires a magnet for visitation and footfall at the southern end, such as a decorative and applied arts museum, to leverage existing cultural infrastructure and institutions and to create a lively, dynamic and attractive destination day and night**

The existing cultural institutions within the wider precinct can be used to transform the street into a vibrant cultural precinct that brings vitality, energy and presence. This could be achieved through the conversion of the Register General's Building, which is predominantly used as office space, to a new cultural institution that provides a new gateway to visitor attraction.

While the wider precinct already includes several important institutions, they are smaller in scale and attract few visitors by comparison to other cultural institutions across Sydney. Furthermore, there are no large-scale museums, such as one for decorative and applied arts exhibitions, which could complement and create synergies with the Art Gallery of NSW, the State Library of NSW and the Powerhouse Museum through co-programmed blockbuster shows, in a similar manner to major international cultural precincts such as Exhibition Road in London and the Museum Mile in New York City.

## Exhibition Road, London, UK



Exhibition Road, which runs from South Kensington to Hyde Park in London, is the world's first planned cultural quarter. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, had a vision of an area devoted to the arts and sciences. 'Albertopolis', as it was dubbed, is evident today in the exceptional stretch of 19th and 20th century colleges, public buildings and museums in South Kensington. The street hosts a unique collection of cultural and educational institutions including the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Royal Albert Hall and Imperial College London. Since the Great Exhibition of 1851, Exhibition Road has been a major destination, attracting more than 11 million visitors each year.

In 2011, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea completed the Exhibition Road Project, to transform the road into a world-class streetscape and improve access for all members of the community, with and without disability. Previously, the public realm was filled with street clutter and vehicle traffic, which made it confusing for visitors and unfriendly to pedestrians. The project upgraded the street design, traffic flows and parking arrangements. The upgrade changed the road to a single surface, kerb-free design with minimal street furniture and barriers. Having a less distinct 'track' for through traffic encourages motorists to drive more cautiously and slowly, with greater awareness and consideration for pedestrians. It also provides greater flexibility in the way Exhibition Road can be used in the future.

The cultural precinct is managed by the Exhibition Road Cultural Group, a partnership of the leading international institutions. Its members work together to:

- improve how it feels to visit, work, study and live in the area by enhancing the public space as an introduction to the creativity and innovation within the institutions
- describe and promote what the area has to offer
- help each other promote innovation, inspiration and learning.

## Placemaking and the public realm

Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use and recognises and celebrates the character of a place, paying attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define it, including its heritage. Place-based planning is therefore superior to isolated approaches for each building, function or use, and is vital for supporting visitation and a greater sense of liveability. Great places are people-focused, reflect community values, and are engaging, inclusive, attractive, safe, accessible and connected to other places. A well-designed pedestrian-focused and accessible public domain enhances experiences and creates places for people to move around, gather, rest and enjoy. Connection to open space and a variety of use and functions are also elements to successful places.

### Definitions

- › **Transport accessibility** refers to the ease with which potential visitors are able to visit and use the precinct.
- › **Connectivity** refers to the strength of the links, both physical and intangible, between MSE and other places of interest nearby.
- › **Permeability** refers to the ease with which people can travel to and through the precinct.

Poor transport access, connectivity and permeability impact precinct users in varying ways:

- occupants – including employees, customers, residents and service providers who complete their daily functions within the precinct
- direct users – visitors to individual institutions and users of government investments in arts and culture more generally. These visitors have a specific reason to visit the precinct from elsewhere to complete a task or engage in an activity within the precinct
- secondary users – visitors drawn from proximate attractions and workplaces, perhaps using the precinct as a thoroughfare or simply finding themselves there by chance.

Great places create ways for people to interact and experience spaces at various times of the day and night, encourage visitation, and are engaging and

vibrant. Successful global cities are culturally rich and have a diverse night-time economy. Cultural entertainment and leisure activities create engaging and enjoyable destinations that are buzzing with people and character.

Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings through sympathetic alterations and additions can preserve historic layers, and enhance and reinforce their significance and distinct characteristics. Heritage spaces provide points of difference and deliver an ambiance that cannot be replicated by a new build. Adaptive reuse and opening buildings up to the public assures their long-term viability and creates vibrant and visually exciting places and spaces that people want to live, work or play in.<sup>11</sup>

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**Key finding 2.1: the precinct as a whole lacks its own identity, has lower levels of visitation than other Sydney precincts and lacks vibrancy, but could be a great urban canvas for the night-time economy**

Due to its multiple uses, landowners and operators, the precinct lacks coherence and integration as a destination. In the absence of precinct-wide governance or management, whole-of-precinct marketing and branding has suffered. The precinct is defined purely by its functions rather than as an attractive, interesting and important cultural destination.

The precinct has dedicated event spaces within the Mint, Parliament of NSW and the State Library of NSW, which are utilised for a range of government, business and private functions. Previous initiatives to activate the precinct have included Sunday jazz at the Sydney Hospital Courtyard and the lighting up of the facade of the State Library of NSW during the Vivid Sydney festival. Hyde Park Barracks hosts an annual Christmas Fare, featuring markets and entertainment, and previously hosted the Festival Bar as part of the Sydney Festival.



However, overall the precinct would benefit from a much greater entertainment offering including food and drink venues, spaces for pop-up events and gathering points to attract a more diverse range of visitors throughout the day and night. Currently there are only two relatively popular cafes available, with food and beverage offerings at the Mint being closed. Cultural institutions, cafes and working offices are closed and empty by 5.30pm, so the poorly lit precinct provides limited activation during the day, and nothing after dark.

The absence of night-time operations is emblematic of a broader lack of diversity within the precinct. The small number of cultural and entertainment options, especially for younger people, is notable. Although bars, art installations and public forums may not suit every precinct, MSE currently provides very few options beyond museum and library services. The precinct's poor visitation may therefore be partially credited to a lack of activation and an unwillingness to provide or encourage new uses.

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11 [www.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/docs/general-publications/heritage-in-action-adaptive-reuse-june2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/docs/general-publications/heritage-in-action-adaptive-reuse-june2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2)

## The Rocks



The Rocks, the first site of European settlement in Australia and regarded as the historical old town of Sydney, is an example of successful heritage placemaking that offers a blend of old and new. The Rocks is designed, managed and operated as a highly recognisable heritage area where visitors are able to experience a distinctive environment made up of buildings and public places from the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. Over 14 million people visit The Rocks each year and the precinct contributes \$400 million annually to the NSW visitor economy.<sup>12</sup>

The Rocks is also one of Sydney's popular cultural precincts, including the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and boutique galleries, with close proximity to the Sydney Opera House. It is home to a range of restaurants, pubs and bars, hotels and shops to attract visitors of all ages.

Its history is recognised and celebrated through heritage assets including Cadmans Cottage, The Rocks Discovery Museum, Susannah Place Museum and public art. A self-guided walking tour is available through a 'Walking The Rocks' app.

Weekly outdoor markets enliven the precinct and offer visitors bespoke products and experiences.<sup>13</sup> The Rocks is also host to some of Sydney's vibrant events and festivals, including Vivid Sydney, which incorporates light, live music and pop-ups.

Clear and consistent signage across the precinct creates effective wayfinding, while its aesthetics pay homage to its history through the rock face that gave the area its name, heritage architecture and cobblestoned laneways.

Place Management NSW, which sits within the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, manages the precinct, which includes organising the markets, producing events, providing educational tours and managing heritage preservation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [www.property.nsw.gov.au/rocks-0](http://www.property.nsw.gov.au/rocks-0)

<sup>13</sup> [www.sydney.com/destinations/sydney/sydney-city/the-rocks](http://www.sydney.com/destinations/sydney/sydney-city/the-rocks)

<sup>14</sup> MSEP Civic Precinct Master Plan - McGregor Coxall Report

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**Key finding 2.2: there is limited public use of spaces and buildings**

MSE is multidimensional, used by different people for varying purposes. Many buildings are tenanted or owned by the government, with limited availability for public use. In addition, some of the buildings are underutilised or contain redundant facilities, outdated services or unsympathetic additions.

The lack of 24-hour access to some spaces undermines night-time activities within and through the precinct.

Underutilised public space exists in front of buildings and along the edges, thresholds and entries, including:

- Hyde Park Barracks – the Queens Square open space in front of the barracks. The Land and Property Institute Annex closes off the barracks and its courtyard from the Domain, both physically and visually
  - the Registrar General’s Building – the public forecourt and back of the building are underutilised, the Hospital Road frontage of the building is used for service and surface parking, and the courtyard is closed off by unsympathetic additions and interventions
  - the buildings at the back of Hyde Park Barracks and the Courts complex, which restrict access
  - laneways along edges of buildings, such as between Sydney Hospital and the Mint and between the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks, which are visually obscure to pedestrians
  - Shakespeare Place, in front of the State Library of NSW
  - open space in front of the Mint.
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**Museum Mile, New York City, USA**



Museum Mile is located in the Carnegie Hill neighbourhood on the Upper East Side of New York City, and is named for a concentrated group of museums along Fifth Avenue from 71st Street to 110th Street. The cultural institutions that make their home along Museum Mile offer some of New York City’s finest collections of art, history, design and culture from around the globe.

Anchoring the downtown end of Museum Mile is the world-renowned Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose permanent collection comprises more than 2 million works. Other stops include the Jewish Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Africa Center, the Museum of the City of New York, the National Academy Museum, Neue Galerie, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. The diverse range of museums reflects and recognises the unique cultural influences throughout the city and its history.

As a way of encouraging visitation and making art, education and culture more accessible, the City of New York began the Museum Mile Festival in 1978. The annual celebration shuts down 23 blocks along Fifth Avenue to vehicle traffic and opens the museums free of charge for visitors to immerse themselves in the distinct arts and culture on offer. Over the past 40 years, visitors have come from all over the country and around the world to walk the ‘mile’. The festival engages visitors in art and exhibitions along the public space, with live music, entertainment and workshops throughout.

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**Key finding 2.3: the quality of the public realm is poor and inconsistent**

With the construction and delivery of new precincts like Barangaroo and Martin Place Station, and several major CBD projects underway, visitor's expectations of the quality of the public realm have increased. The mix of large buildings and architecture within the MSE precinct presents a first impression of grandeur, but on closer inspection, ground-level elements lack an aesthetic appeal appropriate for one of Sydney's pre-eminent public spaces.

Elements of the streetscape appear tired. In particular, the footpaths along and within the precinct are not in a good state of repair, use inconsistent materials and appear to be poorly maintained with exposed tree roots and bitumen infill. Footpaths along Macquarie Street and Hospital Road present potential safety hazards due to raised tree roots and inconsistent brick-paving levels. Entryways to connecting footpaths are not clear and pathways are of varying widths. Public lighting does not illuminate the heritage treasures, while the outdoor furniture is poor and badly located.

The many visible loading bays, car parks and storage facilities (including garbage) also impact aesthetic values. The precinct lacks attractive landscaping and gardening, and signage is inconsistent. Potentially reflecting the lack of precinct-wide management, unplanned graffiti is evident along Macquarie Street and on the large ventilation stacks on the western edge of the Domain.



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**Key finding 2.4: the precinct is broadly accessible but has been unable to capitalise on its location on the edge of the CBD, Domain, Art Gallery of NSW and Registrar General's Building as a lively and interesting place**

Transport and pedestrian access to the MSE precinct is one of its greatest strengths and will increase dramatically when the new Sydney Metro is opened in 2024. The precinct is serviced by two major train stations (Martin Place and St James). The MSE precinct is comparable in significance to The Rocks and Darling Harbour, which achieve much higher levels of visitation by tourists and locals alike, while being more accessible for pedestrians to the CBD.

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**Key finding 2.5: the precinct's connectivity with the surrounding CBD is variable to poor, which limits its liveliness**

The interconnectedness of the MSE precinct with its surrounds varies. From the east, the precinct has clear, well-developed and pleasant connections with the Domain and Art Gallery of NSW, except in respect of Hospital Road, which is poor in quality. The southern approach is less walkable, despite its proximity to Hyde Park and St Mary's Cathedral, because the natural flow of pedestrians is disrupted by the heavy traffic and low prioritisation for pedestrians on Prince Albert Road. There is an absence of an obvious 'entrance' from the southern boundary to encourage nearby visitors to make the crossing to the Registrar General's Building, which, despite being an architecturally significant building, does not have any public uses.

The western boundary is perhaps the precinct's best connection, providing a direct link to Queens Square and Martin Place and onwards to George Street. Martin Place is the busiest westerly access point, and will get busier from 2024 when the Metro station opens. However, Macquarie Street is a busy road that prioritises vehicle movement and the 90-second wait for traffic lights at major crossing points creates a barrier to access. Connectivity in the northerly direction is also poor due to the large and busy intersection at Shakespeare Place that takes traffic from the Eastern Distributor and Cross City Tunnel. Although forming a direct crossing between the State Library of NSW and the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, it remains a busy and noisy road intersection and pedestrians avoid it where possible.

There are also weak connective links between The Rocks, Circular Quay and the northern end of Macquarie Street. These adjoining precincts have natural synergies with Macquarie Street due to their heritage significance, varied cultural offerings and high annual visitation. The first physical link, beginning from The Rocks, passes along the Circular Quay promenade to the north of Macquarie Street. Pedestrians are naturally led towards the most prominent landmark of the area – the Sydney Opera House. However, the absence of wayfinding walking from the Sydney Opera House to Hyde Park does little to invite the visitor to walk south towards the MSE precinct.

The unrealised potential of the Cahill Expressway Walk is an even greater missed opportunity. The walkway is narrow, noisy and constrained and not attractive to use. The elevated pathway begins on Cumberland Street in The Rocks and offers outstanding views of the harbour, depositing visitors directly onto Macquarie Street at one of the entrances to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney. Unfortunately, there is no physical link or information provided to encourage these visitors southward towards MSE if they are inclined to use the noisy and narrow walkway. The future redevelopment of Circular Quay should consider cantilevered walkways to the north.

In addition to piecemeal physical links with the surrounding areas, the absence of cultural and thematic connections within the precinct is a further limitation on the precinct's success. Natural walking routes, for example the north-south axis connecting the Anzac Memorial with the Sydney Opera House, are not signposted or widely advertised. Maps, brochures and online information are sometimes available for individual attractions but do not highlight related sights nearby. For example, at nearby locations such as the Art Gallery of NSW and Martin Place Station there are no directions or advertising to inform people of the close proximity of rich cultural offerings. The buildings of the MSE precinct act as a barrier, not a conduit for connectivity and access.

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### **Key finding 2.6: the poor wayfinding and current configuration of buildings, pathways and entrances limits permeability and walkability**

Successful inner-city precincts form natural destinations for pedestrians, who are guided by both explicit directions and more subtle design features in the adjoining urban landscape. However, pedestrian access and navigation throughout the precinct is unclear and uninviting and, in several places, completely prohibited for security reasons. This makes it difficult for visitors to move conveniently between institutions or to nearby attractions.

One of the main east-to-west connections is from Hunter Street, which has a clear entry but low amenity, with its views of the Domain obscured by a skylight of the State Library. For the purposes of security for the Parliament of NSW, it is not feasible to attract higher levels of visitation. The major opportunity for connection is therefore through the Sydney Hospital.

The limited east-to-west connections, such as the walkway through the Sydney Hospital, are not well signposted and do not present as major routes to the wider precinct, especially the Domain and Art Galley of NSW. The Sydney Hospital thoroughfare passes through the ornate Sydney Hospital buildings and peaceful courtyard, offering access to several major buildings of outstanding architectural significance, a café and ample seating options. Despite these attractive features, the permeability of this critical entry point could be greatly improved. The ventilation stacks for the Eastern Suburbs railway located on the other side of Hospital Road are an unattractive and ill-designed barrier. There is considerable scope to redesign these stacks to look more attractive.

The gate to the Sydney Hospital at the western entrance is partially closed and causes congestion. Additionally, at the entrance visitors are overwhelmed with signs providing directions to health services. Maps and directions to nearby attractions are rare and many of the signs throughout the precinct outline rules and restrictions.

On the eastern side of the courtyard a disorientating collection of trees and benches obscure multiple entrances. These are further confused by a visitor



driveway with two gates that is partially blocked by a knee-high brick wall. Large areas of exposed storage facilities face onto the rear north-eastern perimeter of Hospital Road, which weakens the area's use as a courtyard, café area and key entrance to the Domain.

Beyond the precinct boundaries, signage and wayfinding is lacking and inconsistent, with small and inconsistent signs directing visitors to selected attractions. A further complication to the wayfinding is a lack of consistency in messaging. Different fonts and branding are disorientating to a first-time visitor and fail to reinforce the precinct's historical significance. Other visual guidance, such as symbols, coloured footpaths, lighting, hand-held maps and supporting information online are absent. The effects of poor wayfinding and lighting are much worse at night. The design of walkways leaves spots hidden from view, particularly between Martin Place and the Domain, which impacts comfort and safety.

The limited permeability of the precinct will become more evident in the coming decade, as both Sydney Modern and the Martin Place Sydney Metro station are delivered. From 2022, the new and diverse offerings at Sydney Modern are likely to boost visitor numbers to the Art Gallery of NSW cultural zone. From 2024, many of those visitors will access the area via the Martin Place Sydney Metro station. This increase in visitor numbers and in cultural offerings in the Sydney CBD will complement work to enhance the cultural offerings at MSE, but more urgently, will demand greater permeability and better wayfinding as the most direct pedestrian route from Martin Place to the Art Gallery of NSW and Sydney Modern is through MSE.

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**Key finding 2.7: the current usage of Hospital Road diminishes the public realm and acts as a barrier between the MSE precinct and the Domain**

Hospital Road, which provides rear access to most of the buildings within the precinct, remains hostile and unwelcoming to pedestrians. The walking paths are incomplete, disconnected and overgrown with vegetation. The road is littered with loading zones, car parks and storage facilities – with minimal effort made to mask or beautify the structures and fittings exposed to public view. Low levels of traffic and parked cars form a final barrier, limiting access to, and views of, the green spaces to the east.

The buildings along Hospital Road also detract from the public realm. The later expansion to the Registrar General's Building (which has destroyed the northern façade of much of the historically significant main section of the building) contains several government agencies. There is also a 1960s building currently used by the Department of Justice that makes a poor contribution to the streetscape. Along this portion and further along Hospital Road, the public realm appears more like a service laneway.

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**Key finding 2.8: the lack of openness and connectivity in the southern half of the MSE precinct is a key reason for low levels of activity and visitation. This precinct presents major opportunities for improvement**

To the south of the Sydney Hospital courtyard there is limited access to the Mint, Hyde Park Barracks and the Registrar General's Building. Major barriers include walls, parked cars, an ambulance driveway and several auxiliary buildings. For example, the Hospital Road Court building obstructs pedestrian movement between the Domain and Hyde Park Barracks, deterring visitors and limiting incidental interactions with the precinct.

## Vision and precinct management

Connectivity is of paramount importance for institutions within a precinct; the ability to connect with surrounding infrastructure and services is what enables the success of a public space. A sustainable precinct should try to create amenity and a sense of place, and be economically resilient.<sup>15</sup> The ultimate aim in planning and delivering precinct infrastructure, in both greenfield development and redevelopment settings, is ensuring that facilities are integrated and coordinated.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, strategic planning and coordination of a precinct can accommodate changing needs to meet generational expectations.

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### Key finding 3.1: asset owners and occupants within the precinct have varying interests and priorities

There are multiple asset owners and occupants within the MSE precinct, ranging from government agencies to independent trusts and tenants. Asset owners naturally seek to maximise their own benefit, irrespective of wider precinct implications. This has resulted in divergent interests and priorities, which in turn is likely to have led to missed opportunities for precinct coordination, efficient asset utilisation and economies of scale.

For example, the highest priority for the Parliament of NSW is security, with only minimal consideration of the impacts these security measures have on pedestrian permeability. This has resulted in restricted public access to a number of footpaths, diminishing the walkability from Parliament of NSW through to the Royal Botanical Garden Sydney, Domain and Registrar General's Building. On the other hand, the Living Museums assets – Hyde Park Barracks and the Mint – are managed by a trust that considers best utilisation synonymously with the trust's mission, values and financial performance.

Furthermore, the precinct does not have an integrated vision to organise and systematise the activities of the individual institutions. A vision would explain how each asset can contribute to the precinct's overall character and sense of place, which is currently fragmented. Without a coordinated vision and managing entity, it is difficult to attract visitors based on individual asset features.

There is no precinct manager to oversee activities or coordinate stakeholder priorities. As previously noted, The Rocks precinct is a successful historical destination managed in partnership with the NSW Government and the private sector. Place Management NSW manages The Rocks institutions to bring a whole-of-government approach to precinct management and provide world-class experiences for visitors.

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15 [www.thefifthstate.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Precincts\\_ebook\\_final-double-page.pdf](http://www.thefifthstate.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Precincts_ebook_final-double-page.pdf)

16 [www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/48623/Guide-to-Delivering-Community-Precincts.pdf](http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/48623/Guide-to-Delivering-Community-Precincts.pdf)



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# Recommendations

There is significant scope for improving the MSE precinct. The panel offers the following recommendations to provide a framework to guide future decisions and investments, leverage existing assets and the strategic location of the precinct, and help ameliorate existing issues.

The 250th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet in 2038 provides an ideal and historic completion date for a program of work to commemorate this significant milestone. Planning, phasing and sequencing of improvements of this scale need to begin now, initially focusing on the southern part of the MSE precinct.

## 1. Adopt a unified vision for the precinct to create a world-class cultural destination comparable to Exhibition Road (London) and Museum Mile (NYC)

A unified precinct vision would provide the best opportunity to successfully implement the recommendations of the review and deliver improved outcomes for the precinct and the community. The vision will ensure the role, function and composition of the precinct is clearly defined in both the short and longer term.

Our vision will re-position the MSE precinct as a vibrant, connected and active precinct within Sydney's CBD that celebrates NSW's rich cultural heritage through recognition of the civic and social history embodied in its infrastructure and institutions.

This will be delivered through:

- i. articulating and celebrating the multiple facets of NSW's rich cultural heritage through recognition of the civic and social history of the precinct's institutions and infrastructure
- ii. creating a vibrant, connected and active precinct anchored by popular cultural institution(s) that link the Art Gallery of NSW and the Domain to the Sydney CBD, and attracting a diverse range of visitors day and night to create one of the most lively and culturally enriching destinations in Sydney
- iii. implementing the nine recommendations in this report.

This would help position the precinct competitively with other internationally renowned cultural precincts like Exhibition Road and the Museum Mile.

## 2. Strengthen recognition of the precinct's significance to NSW's political, cultural and social history

Further celebration, recognition and commemoration of the significance of Macquarie Street's Aboriginal, political and cultural history is essential to support the precinct's vibrancy and sense of place. Investigation into how the public spaces along the precinct can better acknowledge Aboriginal land is required through consultation with representative bodies of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

To ensure respect and understanding of the First Nations people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists should be procured for any installations and consulted throughout the design process. This would help to powerfully reflect the political, legal, historical and cultural concerns of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Public art and monuments would serve to affirm and assert the many individual and collective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.<sup>17</sup>

Women have been integral to the political and cultural development of the Macquarie Street precinct, and more broadly to NSW as a whole. To celebrate the contribution of women, new plaques and monuments should be erected. Specifically, appropriate commemoration of Caroline Chisholm and her involvement in supporting female immigrant welfare in Australia should be explored.

Finally, the Liberty Walk, a cultural walk connecting the state's highly valuable cultural and historical assets from the Opera House to the Australian Museum, should be created. Named after architect Walter Liberty Vernon, the Liberty Walk should also connect through the redeveloped Martin Place

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<sup>17</sup> [www.australiacouncil.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-arts/](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-arts/)

station, which has the potential to host and display historically and culturally significant artwork. The Liberty Walk will further strengthen the historical and cultural significance of the MSE precinct. It will support the precinct's goal of becoming a distinct visitor destination and provides a unique cultural experience for people of all ages and backgrounds. The information provided throughout the Liberty Walk should also seek to promote the influence of women and Aboriginal Australians.

### **3. Create a new cultural precinct with a great public realm that attracts visitors around the clock**

The precinct needs to showcase the vibrancy, culture and diversity that makes Sydney a globally-renowned city, including world-class cultural facilities. It should attract and invite visitors of all ages and backgrounds during the day and night to learn stories of who we are.

Noting that the NSW Government recently undertook expressions of interest for the redevelopment of disused tunnels at St James Station, activating the tunnels that exit onto Macquarie Street would have a positive benefit on the precinct by enhancing vibrancy and visitation. Possible uses of the tunnels could include underground entertainment, restaurants and bars or retail spaces, subject to feasibility, though we believe that enlivening the precinct at street level is the highest priority.

Providing spaces to support the development of artistic and cultural activities, including pop-up events and night-time activities, is instrumental to a successful heritage precinct. Planning controls affecting MSE should therefore be reviewed to support a wider range of events and activities.

Other possible ways to better engage visitors of all ages and backgrounds and build on the precinct's heritage and cultural identity include:

- embellishing the vent stacks at the Domain to improve their aesthetics while activating them creatively, such as illuminating them with projections of Aboriginal images and programming for the Art Gallery of NSW
- a calendar of programs that are accessible and free to the public – including public art, artistic and musical performances, weekend film screenings, art exhibitions and light trails – incorporating relevant, daring, playful and surprising art forms that facilitate storytelling

- guided tours to discover the historical significance of the heritage sites (including heritage education tours)
- self-guided walking tours – together with leaflets and an app
- interactive installations and playgrounds (temporary or permanent)
- use of temporary signage or themed colours to commemorate historically significant events and bring attention to festivals and programs at venues.

### **4. Repurpose the Registrar General's Building as a new cultural institution focused on the decorative and applied arts, to be programmed collaboratively with other NSW cultural institutions to harness the synergies between their collections and exhibitions, and to create a culturally rich, integrated and unified public realm from the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks to the Domain**

The adaptive reuse of the Registrar General's Building as an anchor cultural institution focused on the decorative and applied arts is a bold and visionary way to interpret the sandstone building to the benefit of the broader community. It would address the need for an anchor cultural institution at the southern end of the precinct, attracting a diverse range of visitors and improving vibrancy and activation.

It also aligns with the NSW Government's objective to recognise Greater Sydney as a leading destination and cultural capital of the Asia-Pacific region by filling identified gaps and increasing the visibility and authenticity of cultural attractions and experiences.<sup>18</sup> The new cultural institution should have synergies with the Powerhouse Museum, Art Gallery of NSW and State Library of NSW.

The removal of barriers that separate the Mint, Hyde Park Barracks and the Registrar General's Building has the potential to transform the southern half of MSE into a cultural hub with outstanding public space. This could include small-scale interventions such as creating new pathways, removing walls and fences, reducing parking spaces, providing new and improved entrances, and establishing 24-hour access to the grounds of all three buildings.

<sup>18</sup> [https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206\\_CIP2025.pdf](https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206_CIP2025.pdf)

The partial or complete demolition of auxiliary buildings could also be explored to further integrate these premier attractions and create a fitting high-quality public realm. The Registrar General's Building annex and Courts Complex are of lesser heritage value and their removal could greatly improve the quantity and quality of public space. This would allow the creation of a new square or plaza that would connect the two existing museums with the new anchor institution and provide a more natural connection between the Domain and Hyde Park.

### **5. Identify spaces within the precinct to showcase and celebrate Sydney's 60,000-year history**

A new space is needed within the precinct to adequately reflect and celebrate Sydney's rich 60,000-plus-year history. This could include a museum or cultural centre to host exhibitions and ceremonies. A space to share the history, spirituality, objects and artistic achievements of Aboriginal Australians should be constructed within a broader display that brings together the individual components of the city's history. The new space should also tell the story of Sydney's evolution from its colonial beginnings through to its development as a global metropolis.

This should be done in collaboration with cultural institutions and collections within the precinct to further reinforce the identity of Macquarie Street as a discrete historical destination.

Curation of the collection should include consultation with appropriate Aboriginal representative groups to ensure respectful representation of Sydney's Aboriginal history. Options to redevelop an existing institution to host the proposed collection should be explored.



### **6. Explore options for the Chief Secretary's Building.**

**6a. Paul Keating recommends returning the Chief Secretary's Building to its original purpose as the office of the Premier and Cabinet, and does not support commercial uses**

**6b. Lucy Turnbull recommends that if it is not practicable for the Chief Secretary's Building to be used as the Premier's and/or Treasurer's offices, then other government, administrative or cultural uses should be investigated. If these are not found to be practicable either, commercial uses that maintain ongoing or regular public access should be explored**

The panel formed a range of views on potential options for the Chief Secretary's Building, including returning it to its original purpose as the office of the Premier and of the Cabinet, and/or other administrative or cultural uses.

The repurposing of the Chief Secretary's Building to accommodate government and/or administrative or cultural uses will provide a proper and appropriate use for one of Sydney's most important historic buildings. The building has been the seat of government administration for more than 100 years but its current role as an office for various government agencies does not benefit its historical and architectural value. Like the Registrar General's Building with its multiple uses, this building suffers a lack of unifying purpose. Ensuring that the building remains in public hands is of central importance given its historical role as a centre of public administration.

The re-use of the Chief Secretary's Building will also provide broader benefits for Macquarie Street and confirm its former exalted place at the civic core of NSW.

### **7. Improve permeability and wayfinding throughout the precinct and prioritise an improved link from Martin Place to the Domain through the Sydney Hospital site**

The improvement of pedestrian links is essential to enhancing amenity and improving the natural flow of people from adjoining attractions. The focus of this recommendation should be small-scale investments

in existing infrastructure as well as exploring opportunities for the development of entirely new connections.

Potential improvements that would greatly enhance the precinct include levelling walking surfaces, upgrading outdated and confusing signage, removing or transplanting trees and other barriers, and shorter waiting times at road crossings.

A new link to connect Martin Place and the Domain directly through Sydney Hospital will significantly improve the precinct's permeability and will help the area rise to the challenge and opportunity of additional pedestrians flowing from Martin Place Sydney Metro station. By constructing a new walkway through the hospital facade, visitors will be able to pass seamlessly from Martin Place to the interior courtyard with clear sightlines of the fountain in the courtyard, the Domain and the Art Gallery of NSW beyond. Such a change could be transformational and will provide a critical connection from Martin Place through to the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney Modern and the Domain. The design of this walkway would need to be sympathetic to the hospital building's heritage and structural integrity.

Enhancement of the pedestrian experience on Hospital Road is another major change that is required immediately. Removing kerbside parking, raising the road to the same level as the hospital courtyard, and introducing a shared zone for vehicles and pedestrians would improve the public realm and clearly indicate that this area is not a back laneway but a vital connection between the CBD, the Domain and the Art Gallery of NSW.

## 8. Enhance safety and amenity

Functional additions are needed to enhance amenity and safety. The installation of improved and well-positioned seating options will provide rest points and encourage extended dwell times. Clear and consistent wayfinding throughout the precinct and surrounds is also needed to enhance visitor experiences. Executed effectively, improved wayfinding can also assist in telling the story of the precinct and its significant cultural, historical and political history.

The installation of well-positioned and appropriate night lighting along footpaths and around buildings throughout the precinct will brighten the street, highlight the facades of heritage buildings, increase

visibility and encourage feelings of safety during the night. Lighting also enhances the aesthetic quality and experience of a place. A general increase in visitation (through the other measures recommended by this review) will also serve to enhance safety within the precinct.

## 9. Relocate agency tenants to facilitate the vision and investigate opportunities for precinct management

To create a vibrant precinct, the individual and unique attributes of each asset and institution should be maximised and there should be a carefully curated mix of uses. This avoids the precinct appearing monotonous. To facilitate the recommendations and vision proposed by the review, the tenants of the Chief Secretary's Building, Registrar General's Building and Hospital Road Court Building, who are using the space as office facilities, should be relocated.

Precinct management should aim to coordinate all precinct events and ensure collaboration between the different asset owners and tenants. A unified approach would bring a whole-of-precinct perspective that is currently lacking. Better management of the precinct's assets would also foster partnerships among the institutions, which would contribute to greater philanthropic contributions and investment outcomes.

Future precinct management should also consider engaging with other stakeholders, outside of the cultural institutions, such as town planners, transport authorities, utility providers and local government. This would ensure that other key stakeholders who are pertinent to the transport access and permeability of the precinct are a part of the decision-making process.







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## Conclusion

The MSE precinct has become the civic and cultural spine of Sydney, with links to the city's earliest surviving European structures and colonial government. Today, the precinct has transformed into a multidimensional area with the establishment of important cultural and government institutions, including Parliament House, Sydney Living Museums and the State Library of NSW.

Despite the precinct's central location and civic significance, there are some major constraints on and around the precinct site. These include minimal wayfinding; inaccessible spaces; separation of connections between public spaces and the precinct buildings; lack of recognition of heritage and historical significance, including 60,000 years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship and connection with Sydney; limited cultural activity; and multiple stakeholders.

While still maintaining connections to their historical significance through statues and exhibitions, many of the institutions have been adapted into office spaces and become individual campuses. The spaces that link the institutions and buildings to each other, and to surrounding streets and the public realm, have been neglected with narrow, damaged and visually obscured paths with limited wayfinding. These constraints limit the precinct's ability to be a unique cultural destination as it is not conducive to a seamless visitor experience between institutions.

The site does, however, offer a unique opportunity to create a connection between the Domain to the east, Hyde Park to the south, the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney to the north and Sydney's CBD immediately to the west. By establishing a clear and accessible link between these four iconic sites, MSE can establish its own identity as a continuously activated cultural and civic place, attracting local visitors and tourists alike around the clock.

The recommendations of this review will support the rejuvenation of the precinct and present an opportunity to reinstate the historical and cultural prominence of the institutions within it. With the upcoming 250th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet in January 1788, there is an exciting opportunity to reinvent the MSE precinct.

## Recommendations snapshot

Recommendation	Placemaking and public realm	Culture and heritage	Management
<p><b>1</b> Adopt a unified vision for the precinct to create a world-class cultural destination comparable to Exhibition Road (London) and Museum Mile (NYC)</p>	✓		✓
<p><b>2</b> Strengthen recognition of the precinct's significance to NSW's political, cultural and social history</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>3</b> Create a new cultural precinct with a great public realm that attracts visitors around the clock</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>4</b> Repurpose the Registrar General's Building as a new cultural institution focused on the decorative and applied arts, to be programmed collaboratively with other NSW cultural institutions to harness the synergies between their collections and exhibitions, and to create a culturally rich, integrated and unified public realm from the Mint and Hyde Park Barracks to the Domain</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>5</b> Identify spaces within the precinct to showcase and celebrate Sydney's 60,000-year history</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>6</b> Explore options for the Chief Secretary's Building.</p> <p><b>6a.</b> Paul Keating recommends returning the Chief Secretary's Building to its original purpose as the office of the Premier and Cabinet, and does not support commercial uses</p> <p><b>6b.</b> Lucy Turnbull recommends that if it is not practicable for the Chief Secretary's Building to be used as the Premier's and/or Treasurer's offices, then other government, administrative or cultural uses should be investigated. If these are not found to be practicable either, commercial uses that maintain ongoing or regular public access should be explored</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>7</b> Improve permeability and wayfinding throughout the precinct and prioritise an improved link from Martin Place to the Domain, through the Sydney Hospital site</p>	✓		
<p><b>8</b> Enhance safety and amenity</p>	✓		
<p><b>9</b> Relocate agency tenants to facilitate the vision and investigate opportunities for precinct management</p>	✓		✓

## Actions

- Adopt a unified vision to re-position the MSE precinct as a vibrant, connected and active precinct within Sydney's CBD that celebrates NSW's rich cultural heritage through recognition of the civic and social history within its infrastructure and institutions.
  - Celebrating the multiple facets of NSW's rich cultural heritage through recognition of the civic and social history within the precinct's infrastructure and institutions
  - Creating a vibrant, connected and active precinct anchored by popular cultural institution(s)
  - Implementing the nine recommendations in this report
- Consult with representative bodies of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to understand how to best recognise and commemorate the First Nations history of NSW.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists should be procured for any installations and consulted throughout the design process.
- Celebrate the contribution of women with new plaques and monuments throughout the precinct, specifically the contributions of Caroline Chisholm.
- Create the Liberty Walk, a cultural walk connecting the cultural and historical assets from the Sydney Opera House to the Australian Museum. The Liberty Walk route should also connect through the redeveloped Martin Place Station, which can display historically and culturally significant artwork.
- Investigate the redevelopment and activation of the disused tunnels at St James Station.
- Review planning controls to support pop-up events and night-time activities, particularly in the new cultural precinct.
- Provide spaces to support pop-up events and night-time activities.
- Develop a range of programs and activities within the precinct to engage and attract visitors of all ages and backgrounds.
- Transform the building into a new cultural institution – a decorative and applied arts museum.
- Identify possible collections to showcase.
- Improve pedestrian access through the removal of existing walls and a reduction in parking spaces.
- Explore the potential removal of adjoining buildings to create a new public square or plaza.
- Identify a space to present components of Sydney's historical journey.
- Engage with Aboriginal groups to identify opportunities to appropriately celebrate Aboriginal culture.
- Collaborate with cultural institutions within the precinct.
- Identify potential options for a museum or cultural centre within the precinct to host exhibitions and ceremonies.
- Repurpose the Chief Secretary's Building to accommodate the executive government or alternate administrative or cultural uses.
- Open key rooms for public access from time to time to commemorate the building's unique role in NSW history.
- Upgrade signs, walking paths and pedestrian crossings.
- Construct a new walkway through the Sydney Hospital facade to link Martin Place with the Domain.
- Raise Hospital Road to the same level as the Sydney Hospital courtyard and convert into a shared zone.
- Install functional additions in the precinct, including increased seating options throughout.
- Install clear and consistent wayfinding throughout the precinct.
- Install well-positioned and appropriate night lighting.
- Relocate the tenants in the Chief Secretary's Building, Registrar General's Building and Hospital Road Court Building to alternative office spaces.
- Investigate opportunities for future precinct management to coordinate precinct events and ensure collaboration between the different asset owners and tenants.
- Consider including other stakeholders, such as town planners, transport authorities and utility providers in precinct management.

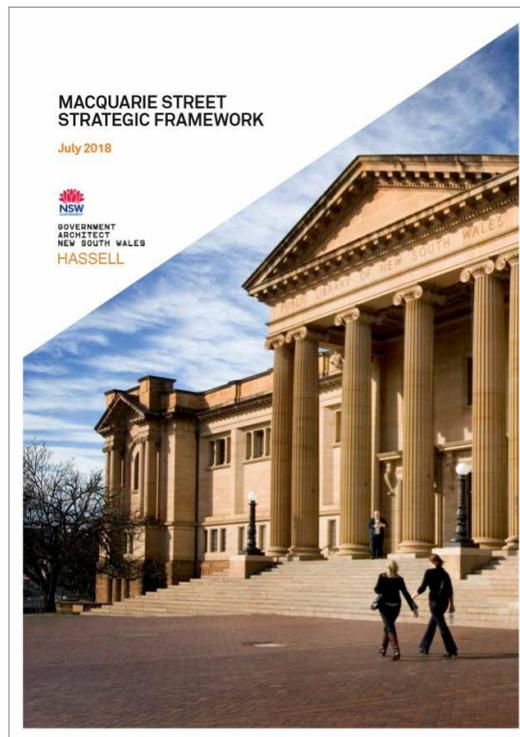


# Appendix A

## Macquarie Street Strategic Framework

In 2015 Property NSW completed a preliminary analysis to identify opportunities to improve government assets in the Macquarie Street precinct. The analysis sought to understand opportunities to create an urban precinct with its own unique and cohesive identity.

This formed the foundation for the Macquarie Street Strategic Framework led by NSW Government Architect. In October 2016, the draft framework and key outcomes for the precinct were exhibited, along with a Call for Ideas for the future of the precinct.<sup>19</sup>



The framework was finalised in July 2018 and is designed to guide future planning and decision-making on opportunities within the precinct, including a vision and objectives. The framework identifies various opportunities, such as improving connections and integration with the broader area and institutions, and possible future uses for buildings within the precinct, and considers opportunities for management and governance.

The objectives of the framework include making Sydney's great walk; creating an authentic publicness; maximising connectivity in all directions; dealing with thresholds, edges and entries; and unlocking the potential of the place.

<sup>19</sup> Framework, page 44; [www.property.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Project%20Postcard.pdf](http://www.property.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/Project%20Postcard.pdf)

## Government strategic context

Various strategic plans and policies for Greater Sydney outline the NSW Government’s vision and aspirations to support liveability and reshape Sydney as it grows.

### Strategic plans

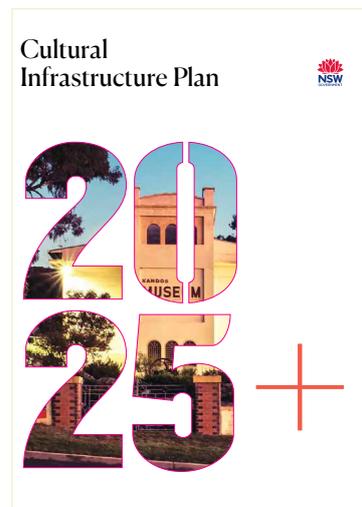
The **Greater Sydney Region Plan: Metropolis of Three Cities**<sup>20</sup> presents a framework to align land use, transport and infrastructure planning for Greater Sydney. The MSE stands within the Eastern Harbour CBD. The plan notes that great places are well-designed environments that are enjoyable and attractive, safe, accessible and walkable. Strategic planning needs to capitalise on local identity, heritage and cultural values to support liveability. The role of the Sydney CBD as the major commercial, financial, cultural and tourist centre needs to be supported and improved.

The 20-year **Eastern City District Plan** outlines planning priorities for the Eastern Harbour City to implement the Greater Sydney Region Plan. These priorities include creating and renewing the city as a great place to bring people together; respecting the district’s heritage; and sustaining communities through vibrant places, walking and cycling, and cultural, artistic and tourism assets.

The **NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038**<sup>21</sup> (SIS) sets out Infrastructure NSW’s independent advice on infrastructure priorities over the next 20 years. Among its 122 recommendations adopted by the NSW Government, the SIS includes a focus on adopting a place-based approach to infrastructure planning and delivery; supports investment in cultural infrastructure and institutions; and aims to improve intra-city connectivity, including walking and cycling infrastructure.



The **Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+**<sup>22</sup> is the NSW Government’s guide for the planning and delivery of dynamic cultural infrastructure that will support a thriving cultural sector. It provides a strategic framework for investing in and supporting cultural infrastructure across NSW. It identifies that within the Eastern Harbour City, there is an opportunity to establish cultural clusters in key sites such as the Macquarie Street Heritage precinct.



**Future Transport 2056**<sup>23</sup> is an overarching strategy, supported by a suite of plans, to achieve a 40-year vision for the transport system in NSW. It also focuses on the role of transport in delivering movement and place outcomes to support the character of the places and communities we want for the future, noting that the liveability, amenity and economic success of communities and places are enhanced by transport.

**Sustainable Sydney 2030**<sup>24</sup> outlines the City of Sydney’s environmental, economic, social and cultural goals, and commitment to the sustainable development of Sydney to 2030 and beyond. It is the city’s highest level strategic plan for a green, global and connected city. Its aims include a city for walking and cycling, a lively and engaging city centre, and a cultural and creative city.

## Policies and guidelines

**Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW**<sup>25</sup> provides design policy to create better places and spaces to meet the needs of future generations. The policy supports the creation and renewal of great places and notes that well-designed places have the potential to link new and old, are more efficient and healthier, and support social cohesion. Well-designed places add value and attract and retain residents, jobs, global talent, tourists and investment.

**Better Placed Design Guide for Heritage**<sup>26</sup> supports the use of good design to enable heritage significance to be protected, while enhancing the experience of heritage places for everyone.

**The Movement and Place Framework** provides an integrated land-use and transport planning approach, recognising that transport and placemaking must be co-designed to enhance both journey and destination. It aims to balance the needs of safe and efficient movement of people, enabling vibrant and successful places for local communities, and providing safe road environments with high amenity to improve the liveability of our cities. ■

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20 <https://gsc-public-1.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/greater-sydney-region-plan-0618.pdf>

21 [https://insw-sis.visualise.today/documents/INSW\\_2018SIS\\_BuildingMomentum.pdf](https://insw-sis.visualise.today/documents/INSW_2018SIS_BuildingMomentum.pdf)

22 [https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206\\_CIP2025.pdf](https://create.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/20190206_CIP2025.pdf)

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26 [www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/design-guides/better-placed-design-guide-for-heritage-2019-01-30.pdf](http://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/design-guides/better-placed-design-guide-for-heritage-2019-01-30.pdf)



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The views expressed herein are those of the Expert Panel on the Macquarie Street East Precinct and do not necessarily represent the views of the State of New South Wales.