

MyPlace Ashmore Community Survey 2020

Executive Summary



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By Hazel Easthope, Edgar Liu and Sian Thompson

City Futures Research Centre
Faculty of Built Environment
UNSW Australia

www.cityfutures.net.au

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Executive Summary

The Ashmore Precinct is one of the City of Sydney's largest urban development projects. The 17-hectare site is being developed over the next 10 years into a mixed-use precinct which will eventually house around 6,000 residents (COS 2020). A retail area with cafes and a small supermarket are planned, as is a new 7,400sqm park and a green walking and cycling link between Harry Noble Park in the north and Sydney Park in the south (COS 2020). The City of Sydney's Community Strategic Plan (COS 2017) recognises that urban renewal sites such as the Ashmore Precinct provide the opportunity to make significant improvements to the improve the social, economic and environmental performance of the City and Sydney region.

The City of Sydney's vision for a socially sustainable city is a socially just and resilient city – a city for all (COS 2016a). One of the major pillars of this vision is that “our city is a place where people are welcomed, included and connected” (objective 6.2 in COS 2020). So that the City can identify how it might best support communities' social wellbeing associated with environmental, economic and social changes, it is essential to collect information about the experiences and desires of residents and workers. This includes their satisfaction with, and feelings of attachment and belonging to, the places they live and work, the nature of their social interactions and social cohesion, and their plans and desires regarding their local areas. To this end, this report presents the results of a community survey of residents and workers in the Ashmore Precinct and the surrounding established area (henceforth the 'Ashmore Area'). The City intends for the survey to be undertaken on a recurring basis over coming years, to monitor changes to the social fabric over time as the urban renewal area develops.

Research aims

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

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

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

Background

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

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

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

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

Survey development

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

The survey tool was developed from a comprehensive research process, which included a pilot survey. A full survey for the Green Square renewal area was run in 2014, and another (expanded to include the Ashmore Precinct) in 2017. The survey was amended between 2014 and 2017 in response to consultations undertaken with a wide range of City of Sydney staff, with the main change being a reduction in the number of questions asked. The 2017 and 2020 surveys are identical except for a change to allow different areas within the Ashmore Precinct (results from this precinct are presented in a separate report) to be identified.

In total, 1,206 people completed the survey in the Ashmore Area in 2020, an area including the Ashmore Precinct and surrounding streets in the nearby established areas of Erskineville. The Ashmore survey therefore provides interesting insight into a new redevelopment area located within an established residential area. The survey respondents included 1,191 residents and 125 workers (110 people both lived and worked in the Ashmore Area). The body of this report presents the findings for residents. With a weighting for age applied, *the results for residents of Ashmore presented in this report can be understood as broadly representative of the total resident population of Ashmore, with a margin of error of less than 3%.* The survey somewhat underrepresents men and people living alone and significantly underrepresents people speaking a language other than English at home (6% of survey respondents compared to 18% of residents at the last census).

Key findings

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

Wellbeing of residents

- Almost all residents (97%) agreed that the area was a good place to live. Almost all people (91%) in households with children agreed the area is a good place to raise children and the majority of people aged over 50 (71%) think the area is a good place to retire.

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- The most commonly selected reasons for moving to the area were proximity to the Sydney CBD (68%), lifestyle factors (67%) and proximity to public transport (65%), repeating the findings of the 2017 survey.
 - The things people most commonly said that they liked about living in the Ashmore Area were the convenient location (74%) and proximity to the Sydney CBD (72%) and access to public transport (72%). They also liked the café/restaurant culture (74%) and parks and green spaces (68%).
 - The things people most commonly said that they disliked about living in the Ashmore Area related to the danger of overdevelopment, with concerns over the impacts of construction (55%), especially in densifying the neighbourhood (47%). Many people were also concerned about heavy traffic (53%) and the lack of parking (44%).
 - Around half of Ashmore Area residents felt part of the community at different geographical scales from the building to the country. Feelings of attachment were slightly greater at the scale of the suburb (57%) than at other scales. This is above the average for the City of Sydney as a whole (44% of people were satisfied with feeling part of their community in their local area in the 2018 City of Sydney Wellbeing Survey). Attachment at all scales, apart from attachment to Australia, declined slightly between the 2017 and 2020 surveys.
 - As expected, a large proportion (70%) of residents in the newer Ashmore Precinct area have lived there for 5 or less years. However, in the more established area surrounding the precinct more than half of residents (58%) had lived there for 5 years or less. The majority (80%) of residents in the Ashmore area planned to remain resident in the area for a number of years, with the proportion slightly higher amongst residents in the newer Ashmore Precinct (83%) than in the surrounding established areas.
 - Two-fifths (42%) of residents were satisfied with the level of social interaction they have with other people who live and work in the Ashmore Area, with the remaining 59% all wanting more interaction, including 17% who currently had no interaction with other people in the area. Private renters and people aged under 29 are much more likely to desire more involvement with others in the local area, with one-third of private renters (37%) and people aged under 29 (33%) having no involvement with others in the area but wanting some.
 - The most commonly mentioned group of improvements residents wanted in the Ashmore Area related to socialising opportunities, including the variety of cafes, restaurants and bars (58%) and the availability of evening activities (42%). The types of improvements people prioritised differed between age groups, with people aged under 29 much more likely (71%) to mention the importance of a variety of cafes, restaurants and bars and evening activities than older age groups.
 - Most Ashmore residents travel to work or study using public transport (61%), and most walk (63%) and/or drive (51%) to the supermarket or shops. Many people also walk (60%) to other social, sport or recreational activities.

The nature of social interaction and social cohesion in the area

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- While most people (97%) said they would help their neighbours, fewer (69%) thought their neighbours would help them, reflecting the findings of the 2017 survey. This is slightly higher than the figures for the city as a whole, where 95% of people said they would help their neighbours and 50% said they could get help from their neighbours when needed (City of Sydney Wellbeing Survey

2018). Two-fifths of residents (42%) borrowed things and exchanged favours with neighbours and 54% regularly stopped to talk with people in their neighbourhood.

- Most (82%) resident survey respondents meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least weekly. A small proportion (5%) meet with friends, relatives or work colleagues less than once per month.
- The most common ways in which people have contact with other people while in the Ashmore Area were socialising in cafés, restaurants and/or pubs (74%) and chatting to people on the street (66%).
- Incidental interaction (running into people you know) was most likely to occur in a café, restaurant or pub (73%), on local streets (71%) or at local shops (65%) and parks (57%) or in the entrance or near the building they live in (56%).
- Many residents said most of that their friends were of a similar age (77%) and educational background (72%) and just over half (53%) that they were of a similar ethnic background.
- Many Ashmore Area residents were involved in civic activities in the past 12 months such as signing a petition (52%), joining a protest or demonstration (31%), participating in an online discussion (26%), and completing a research survey (26%). One in six Ashmore Area residents attended a community meeting or consultation event (17%), and less participated in council planning processes or been involved in a Development Application process (14%). The proportion of people who had participated in all types of activities decreased between the 2017 and 2020 surveys, with the notable exception of an increase in the proportion of people who had joined a protest or demonstration and a slight increase in the proportion of people involved in running a strata scheme. The proportion of people who had joined a protest or demonstration also increased across the City to 28% in 2017 (City Wellbeing Survey 2018). This may be explained by the widely attended climate change protests that occurred in 2019.
- One-third of the residents thought that they understand the rights around urban development and planning for the local area (34%). Related to this, just over a third (34%) felt that their thoughts about local issues in Ashmore Area could be heard by people who make a difference and agreed that there was strong local leadership in the area (30%). Smaller percentages felt that they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area (20%) or contributing to shaping the area (20%).
- The majority of residents felt safe or unconcerned in all situations except for walking in Ashmore Area alone after dark, in which circumstance 14% of people felt unsafe or very unsafe, reflecting the findings of the 2017 survey.
- The majority (70%) of residents agree that most people can be trusted.

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

The results of the survey demonstrate the following:

- The services and facilities in the Ashmore Area most commonly used by residents were local cafés and restaurants (97%) and local parks (88%). Neighbourhood and community centres were only used by 13% of respondents overall, however one fifth of part-time employed (19%) and people not in the labour force (21%) used these facilities.

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- The most common limitation people experience to socialising with others in the area is time constraints (48% often or all of the time). Another important limitation is difficulty in finding information about social activities (19% often or all of the time).
 - People would like to get information about opportunities to participate in social activities in their local area electronically, such as via social media (67%), e-mails (53%), and websites (47%). Preferences differ by age and language spoken at home.

Implications for practice

The results of the survey were presented to staff across the City of Sydney Council. It is expected that the survey findings will be used to inform Council's investments and activities across a range of areas, including community development, civic engagement, communications, place making, land use planning, open space and public domain planning, and local business development. The implications for practice presented here are preliminary and it is expected that City staff will further analyse and apply the survey findings to inform their work going forward. The City intends for the survey to be undertaken on a recurring basis over coming years, to monitor changes to the social fabric over time as the urban renewal area develops.

Implications for community development

Most Ashmore area residents who completed the survey had lived in the area for 5 years or less (61% overall, 70% in the Ashmore Precinct and 58% in the surrounding areas) and 80% plan to remain resident in the area for a number of years (slightly higher in the Ashmore Precinct at 83%). The majority (59%) of residents want more social connections with people who live and work in the area, including almost one in five (17%) who currently have no interactions with people in the area. Interventions to encourage social interaction will be needed that engage residents who have a desire for more social interaction but are constrained because of time constraints (48%), finding information about opportunities available to them (19%) and confidence speaking with strangers (11%). Private renters and people aged under 29 are much more likely to desire more interaction with people in the area suggesting that programs that target these groups may be beneficial.

Implications for civic engagement

Around a third (34%) of residents felt they understood their rights around planning and urban development in the local area (a slight reduction from 2017 when the figure was 40%), and a fifth (20%) felt they had made a civic contribution by working with others to improve the area or contributing to shaping the area. A similar proportion of residents had attended a community meeting or consultation event (17%) or participated in council planning processes of Development Application processes (14%). Participation in such activities decreased between 2017 and 2020, with the notable exception of participation in a protest or demonstration and a slight increase in the proportion of people involved in running a strata scheme. There is potential for further increased civic engagement amongst residents in the area as demonstrated by the high proportion of residents who had signed petitions (52%) and participated in a protest or demonstration (31%).

Implications for communications

Aside from time constraints (48%), difficulty in finding information about social activities was also a limitation given by some residents (19%) to socialising with others in the area. People who spoke a language other than English at home were much more likely to be limited in participating in social activities by time constraints (70%), difficulty finding information about social activities (45%), not feeling welcome and having difficulty accessing facilities and venues than residents who speak English at home. However, only a small proportion (6%) said that language difficulties limited them from socialising with others. The sample of people

who speak a language other than English at home was quite small, however (n=62), so these results should be treated with caution.

Residents would like to receive information about social activities through social media (67%), e-mail (53%), websites (47%) and noticeboards (41%). The City can provide such information through City-specific social media and through partnering with other social media platforms known to be actively used in the area, as well as collaborating with building managers. These approaches were effective in promoting the survey to residents. However, the ways in which people would like to receive information differ between different groups. People who speak a language other than English at home are much more likely to want to receive information by word of mouth (71%), websites (62%), at the local community centre or library (31%) and through advertisements in local newsletter or local businesses. They were less likely than people who speak English at home to want to receive information via social media (53%), noticeboards (27%) and e-mailed community newsletters (29%). Responses also differ by age. Notably, people aged over 50 were much less likely to want to receive information via social media (42%) and more likely to want information in printed community newsletters (39%) compared to younger age groups. However, e-mailed community newsletters were a more popular option amongst this older age group (57%). These results indicate that a variety of communication methods will be needed to reach all groups. However social media, e-mailed community newsletters and websites are important sources of information.

Implications for placemaking

Almost all (97%) residents agreed that the area is a good place to live and there was little change before and after the covid-19 restrictions were introduced. This represents an improvement from 2017 when 94% of residents agreed with this statement. This suggests a very high satisfaction with the area. However, only around half of all residents felt connected to the community at all scales from the building to the country and attachment at all scales (aside from Australia) declined between 2017 and 2020. Attachment at the level of the suburb is slightly higher (57%) than at other scales, pointing to the importance of acknowledging and supporting existing place attachments of local residents as the area continues to change. There is a complicated relationship between attachment to the building in which one lives, building type and length of residence. The highest level of attachment at the building scale was amongst apartment residents who had lived in the area for more than 6 years (66%), suggesting potential for further community development at the apartment building scale to engage more recent apartment residents.

Implications for land use planning

The things people most commonly said they disliked about the area related to the danger of overdevelopment and the impacts of construction (55%) on the area and its overall density (47%). Many people were also concerned about heavy traffic (53%) and the lack of parking (44%). While improvements to public transport and traffic management were the most important improvements noted by residents in 2017 (mentioned by 44% and 42% of resident respectively), in 2020 they remained important (mentioned by 42% and 35% of residents respectively) but were no longer the most commonly mentioned improvements (which were a greater variety of cafes restaurants and bars and more evening activities). Almost two-thirds (51%) of Ashmore Area residents travel to work or study by public transport and 65% said that public transport was one of the reasons they moved to the area, demonstrating the important role that public transport plays in the attractiveness of the area.

Notably, improvements that residents wanted to see in the area differed between age groups with younger people more likely to desire a greater variety of cafes, restaurants and bars and evening activities, while older people were more likely to desire landscaping in streets and parks and improved traffic management.

Implications for open space, public domain and community facility planning

Parks and public spaces are significant locations for social interaction in the Ashmore Area and heavily used by residents. After cafes and restaurants (97%), local parks (88%) were the most commonly used facilities and 57% of people said that they experienced incidental interaction in parks. This could influence local land use planning and infrastructure development in the Ashmore Area and in future urban renewal areas, as it indicates that parks are important in facilitating local social interaction. However, there remains an important role for more formal community facilities, especially for particular groups. While only one in ten (13%) people used community and neighbourhood centres, a higher proportion of part-time employed (19%) and people not in the labour force (21%) made use of these facilities.

Implications for local business

The most common places where people socialise with others in the Ashmore Area is cafes, restaurants and/or pubs (74%), and incidental interaction is also common in these places (73%) and at local shops (65%). Cafes and restaurants are also commonly used services and facilities (97%). Such businesses are therefore playing an important social role in the area, and more than half (58%) of residents said that they would like to see a wider variety of cafes, restaurants and bars in the area in the future. This suggests that the ideal of mixed-use development encouraging greater social interaction is supported by the findings in this case and this has implications for development application planners who are making decisions about new businesses in the area. A supermarket and associated retail (including cafes) is planned as part of the Greenland development in the Ashmore Precinct.