

Council Street Renewal – Frequently Asked Questions

City of Newcastle is renewing Council Street, Cooks Hill, between Darby and Bruce Streets. This project aims to address stormwater management by renewing and upsizing the drainage infrastructure, landscaping the street, replacing the deteriorated footpath, roadway, kerb and gutter, and improving road safety/traffic circulation issues.

Works include

- Tree removal to install new stormwater drainage
- Plant new street trees and landscaped vegetation
- Removal of existing road block
- Change traffic flow to one way from Darby to Bruce Streets (east to west)
- New road and footpath pavement, including sandstone kerb
- New separated bicycle lane between Darby and Bruce Street
- Intersection blisters for traffic calming
- Install bicycle racks on corner of Council and Darby Street
- Install new street lighting

Artist impression of Council Street, viewed from Bruce Street, Cooks Hill



When will the works occur?

Council Street works will begin in February 2018. Timeframes for construction will be confirmed with residents and businesses upon finalisation of a suitable contractor and a review of the construction methodology.

Like the current Swan Street works, full infrastructure replacement within the road reserve requires:

- tree removal
- utility relocations (eg gas, water, electrical, communications)
- excavation works to replace stormwater drainage, road, pavement and footways
- plant trees and landscape vegetation

Timing of works

The proposed works will be undertaken during standard construction hours of 7.00am to 6.00pm Monday to Friday and 8.00am to 1.00pm Saturdays with no work on Sundays or public holidays.

There may be times when construction is required outside of these hours in order to limit the impacts on pedestrian, vehicles and business, for example the works on the corner of Council Street and Darby Street. Directly impacted residents and businesses will be notified of works and timeframes closer to the time.

Trees

Why are the trees being removed?

There is significant interaction between tree roots, road, footpath, kerb, gutter, stormwater drainage infrastructure and houses in Council Street.

Tree roots have created issues with stormwater drainage, parking and trip hazards for pedestrians. The trees have experienced repeated impacts from motor vehicles, causing damage that can create long-term decay and degrades the structure of the tree roots. Vehicles may also get damaged by parking on the tree root leading to insurance claims.

Despite the fact that most trees appear green and healthy, many of the trees have become increasingly unstable due to decaying and poorly developed root systems. Tree roots in Council Street have experienced many impacts from utility maintenance works underground (gas, water and telecommunications). These trees are at risk of falling onto properties.

Council has undertaken an assessment to assess the possibility of relocating or reconfiguring the road works to avoid significant injury to the trees. As the stormwater drainage upgrade and road renewal works cannot avoid significant excavation within the trees stabilising root zone, the trees would pose an unacceptable risk for visitors, residents and property in Cooks Hill if left in place.

What new trees will be installed in Council Street?

New trees and landscaping is incorporated within the proposal.

An independent landscape architect was engaged by Council to select suitable tree species options for Council Street.

Council Street is a narrow road with two-storey buildings with minimal to no property setback from the boundary. The combination of these neighbourhood attributes creates a 'canyon effect' which narrows the available space for trees. The landscape architect recommendations were to adopt deciduous tree species, ultimately providing shade in summer and sunshine in winter.

The final tree species for the street were chosen based on their suitability to the environment. Residents with trees in the front of their property chose the 17 new street trees being planted in Council Street.

The trees chosen for Council Street include Crepe Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia 'tuscarora'*) and *Lagerstroemia 'natchez'*, *Pyrus calleryana 'Chanticleer'* - 'Chanticleer' Callery Pear and *Nyssa sylvatica* - Black Gum.

Artist impression of Council Street, viewed from Bruce Street, Cooks Hill



Traffic

What options were considered to improve road safety when renewing Council Street?

Community feedback in 2015 indicated traffic management was a high priority for Cooks Hill residents. In response, Council Street traffic management was investigated as part of the stormwater drainage renewal project. Several concept options to improve traffic management were initially assessed by Council, these included:

Option 1: One way Darby to Bruce Street

- One way traffic, west bound.
- 45 degree parking north side. Parallel south side.
- Road block removed
- Dedicated cycleway (north side)

Option 2: Combined one way & two way

Eastern end (Dawson to Darby Streets)

- One way traffic, west bound.
- 45 degree parking north side. Parallel south side.
- Road block removed
- Dedicated cycleway (north side)

Western end (Bruce to Dawson Streets)

- Two way traffic.
- Parallel parking both sides.
- No dedicated cycleway

Option 3: Two way from Darby to Bruce Street

- Two way traffic
- Parallel parking both sides.
- Retain road block
- No dedicated cycleway

Option 4: Eastbound one-way traffic and angled parking

The eastbound traffic flow was not considered as an option as it would funnel more cars onto Darby Street which would be detrimental to traffic flow. However it's included to show the option was analysed.

How was the decision made for traffic flow along Council St?

The four options above were presented to the Newcastle City Traffic Committee (NCTC), with representatives from Roads and Maritime Service, NSW Police, State and Local MPs and Council. From this meeting, option 1 and 2 were preferred, as they offered the safest outcome for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

Option 1 and 2 were presented to Councillors in April 2016, with a recommendation for option 1 to be endorsed. This option was in keeping with the option preference developed at a prior workshop for affected residents.

Councillors requested both options to be placed on public exhibition.

A public exhibition process was held for the change in traffic movements along Council Street, with 13 submissions. Majority of submissions supported option 1.

Following the public exhibition process, Option 1 was recommended to the elected Councillors on the 26 July 2016 Ordinary Council Meeting. During this meeting, Councillors voted to endorse Option 1.

Additional community feedback from the public exhibition was incorporated into the designs where feasible. Unfortunately not all suggestions could be accommodated.

What benefits does the one-way proposal provide?

The one way (both end) proposal was assessed by the NCTC and Council to provide a safer environment for pedestrians, increased parking spaces for Darby Street businesses and residents, greater number of new trees and a dedicated safer cycleway from Bruce Street to Darby Street.

Key safety benefits:

- U-turns at the Darby Street and Council Street intersection would be difficult for the one way configuration. Over a four hour period during the traffic study, the consultant witnessed 43 cars perform an unsafe, illegal U-turn at this intersection. Council considers the one way proposal a key component in eliminating any risk of harm to pedestrians from vehicles on the corner of Darby Street and Council Street.
- A separated cycle way between the parking bays and footpath, providing a safer alternative for cyclists, and helps with reducing congestion and pollution in Newcastle
- One way vehicle movements provides shorter distances for pedestrians to cross the road and provides better line of sight to oncoming traffic at intersections.

Why is the mid-block road closure being removed?

A concept was developed which retained the road block, however the following safety concerns meant the concept was not recommended by the Newcastle City Traffic Committee, representing NSW Police, Local and State MPs, Roads and Maritime Services and Council.

Safety and economic concerns:

- No separated cycle path
- The turning circle for vehicles would not meet Council's criteria for turning radius. This would result in service vehicles (e.g. waste) being unable to make safe turning movements. Service vehicles would be required to reverse, increasing risk to vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.
- To upgrade the existing road block would result in the loss of 13 car spaces. The one way proposal incorporates 7 new car spaces. Residents had expressed parking as a high priority for Cooks Hill.
- Unsafe U-turns would continue at the Darby Street and Council Street intersection

Will the traffic volumes increase if the mid-block road closure is removed from Council Street?

An independent traffic consultant was engaged to provide a traffic study and analysis for the removal of the road closure. The traffic study and analysis did not indicate a significant increase in traffic using Council Street due to the one-way westbound direction.

The independent Study noted traffic northbound from Darby Street turning left will be low as it is anticipated to only be traffic wishing to use the carpark, bottle shop or to find parking between Darby and Dawson Street.

Southbound traffic on Darby Street wishing to turn into Council Street will be discouraged as it's faster to continue straight and then turn right into Bull Street, as there are no stop/give-way signs along this route.

What are the traffic impacts during construction?

During construction, access to Council Street will be restricted for certain activities including the removal of trees and the relocation/installation of utilities.

To minimise impacts on road users, a detour using the surrounding road network would be in place for local traffic during this time. Access to residential properties and businesses will be maintained throughout the construction phase; however there may be short delays due to certain construction activities preventing access.

Road users in the surrounding streets are likely to experience minor disruptions and temporary delays throughout the construction period.

Minor disruptions to pedestrian flow are also anticipated at different times during construction.

Detailed information will be provided to residents and businesses closer to the time.

A Traffic Management Plan will be in place throughout works. Direct liaison with works supervisor will be available to residents and businesses throughout the work period.

Parking

Will there be changes to car parking spaces?

The north side of Council Street will provide 45 degree rear angled parking.

The south side of Council Street will maintain parallel parking.

The changes will result in seven additional car parking spaces for residents and businesses in the precinct.

The time limit for car spaces on Council Street is anticipated to remain the same, however will be analysed by the Newcastle City Traffic Committee. Information will be made available if the time limits change.

Environment

How have environmental impacts been assessed?

A Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for the proposed works was completed, and addresses all relevant legislation under the Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW). The REF reviews all statutory requirements on the proposed works to ensure the works comply with all legal considerations prior to approval.

A Flora and Fauna Assessment for the Council Street project has been prepared by independent consultants. The Flora and Fauna Assessment presents an assessment of the habitat changes to ensure the works outcomes protect the City's environmental values. The Flora and Fauna assessment addresses all statutory requirements under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (NSW).

Communications

What communication has been provided to residents?

A Communication Plan for Council Street project has been implemented to ensure affected residents have been actively involved in the design consultation process.

Initially a series of street corner discussions were held across Cooks Hill to increase awareness of stormwater issues and solutions that can be effectively delivered by residents within their streets, including Council Street.

Two workshops were conducted with Council Street residents to gather their values and aspirations for their neighbourhood and discuss constraints in delivering project objectives.

The preferred design option was publicly exhibited covering stormwater drainage, traffic calming, pedestrian and cycling assets, parking alignments, tree scale and locations, landscaping elements and street lighting.

Two community meetings have been held post exhibition to inform affected residents of design progress, as well as a number of letters distributed to residents providing updates on the project.

Residents with trees out the front of their property were sent voting forms to choose their preferred tree species as per Council guidelines.

A community information drop-in session was held in January 2018, inviting all residents of Cooks Hill to learn about the variety of infrastructure projects that are occurring in their area.

Further information will be provided to affected Cooks Hill residents on the future plans to improve their drainage and footpaths.

More information

Please contact your Project Manager, Patrick Burgess, on 4974 2558 or mail@ncc.nsw.gov.au