

Why is the Blackbutt Village area on Orchardtown Road being upgraded?

In 2016 we audited all of the Local Centres within Newcastle LGA. Through this process Orchardtown Road was prioritised for renewal based on the condition of the infrastructure, and concerns raised by the community about safety issues at Orchardtown Road. The project seeks to balance the needs of the whole community for a safe, functional and liveable space.

Over 200 people responded to an online survey we conducted on Blackbutt Village and the community's top three ranked priorities for improvement were:

1. Pedestrian safety, access and connectivity (36%)
2. Traffic safety (25%)
3. Aesthetics (look and feel of the area) (17%)

We also undertook a Personal Experience Survey in June 2019 with 50 people on site. Results from this survey highlighted a lack of public art and spaces for people to gather, and a lack of opportunities for activation by the community and businesses in the area.

How has City of Newcastle engaged with the community so far?

Based on insights gathered during early consultation we prepared the draft Blackbutt Village, Orchardtown Road Public Domain and Traffic Plan which was on public exhibition for community comment from 2 March until 23 April 2020.

Due to COVID-19 a community workshop planned for 28 March 2020 had to be cancelled. In lieu of this we provided an additional questionnaire to registered workshop attendees and extended the exhibition period to 23 April 2020.

Following the public exhibition, we finalised the Public Domain Plan in line with community submissions. The [final Public Domain Plan](#) was adopted by the elected Council on 22 September 2020.

During earlier consultation we also heard the availability of safe parking options is important to the local community. We sought feedback from local businesses, and then asked for broader community feedback on a range of timed (not paid) parking options in the area.

The changes to timed parking are intended to increase the turnover of parking spaces closest to the shops - making it easier to find a parking space when shopping or dining in the area. Timed parking will be implemented once construction is complete. We will continue to monitor parking space turnover to ensure the new timed parking arrangements are fit for purpose and meeting the needs of the community.

The survey closed on 1 August 2022, and the outcomes from this consultation can be found on our [Have Your Say webpage](#).

What further consultation is planned?

As part of the next stage of the Local Centre Upgrade, the community is now invited to provide feedback on concept designs for two public plaza spaces. These spaces are designed to facilitate social interaction and enhance the community and visitor experience. You can vote on your favourite plaza design at our [Have Your Say webpage](#). **Feedback is open until 5pm on 2 October 2023.**

What are the main features of the design?

- A new 40km/hr zone to improve safety.
- An off-road shared pedestrian and cycle path which forms an integral part of the broader Newcastle cycle network.
- A new pedestrian crossing and new footpath connections to Blackbutt Reserve and Richley Reserve.
- Wider footpaths and new plazas to improve outdoor dining and promote activation of the centre.
- Renewal of drainage, kerb, gutter, road, footpaths, lighting and street furniture.
- Tree planting and landscaping.

How will the upgrade make the area safer?

- We will address safety concerns raised by the community, for pedestrian access to the shops from the western carpark, by installing a new pedestrian crossing.
- We will remove the risk caused by vehicles manoeuvring into parking spaces in a busy traffic environment and drivers opening doors onto cyclists by relocating existing parallel parking from the busy main through road onto the quieter eastern one way aisle and western side road.
- We will slow drivers down by reducing the speed limit to 40km/h, removing parking lanes to narrow the main through road, and by lining it with an avenue of trees.
- We will make it safer for pedestrians to enter and exit parked vehicles with 90 degree and parallel parking on the quieter eastern one way aisle and western side road. New parking will be designed to Australian Standards for safety.
- We will move the eastern one way aisle exit northward, further from the intersection of Carnley Avenue and Orchardtown Road.
- We will deliver a shared pedestrian and cycle path on the western side of Orchardtown Road, forming part of an important connection between Blackbutt Reserve and Kotara Train Station. We have closed the intersection of Dunkley Avenue and Orchardtown Road to improve safety for path users in this location.
- We will work with Transport for NSW (TfNSW) to improve safety at the intersection of Carnley Avenue and Orchardtown Road through an upgrade of the traffic signals.

In addition to these traffic changes, lighting will be provided to an appropriate standard, including lighting for the pedestrian crossing, pedestrian refuge and bus stops. Two disabled parking spaces designed to current Australian Standards will be provided close to the shops, and the taxi rank will be moved to an accessible location on Carnley Avenue outside Blackbutt Hotel.

These changes make parking safer to access, and better connected to the shops. Parking turnover will be encouraged with timed (not paid) parking.

How will the upgrade impact parking?

- The original Blackbutt Village layout was developed many decades ago, maximising parking and vehicle access at the expense of pedestrian and cyclist safety and access. Parking in the original layout did not meet safety standards, by upgrading the parking areas to modern standards it will be safer for both drivers and pedestrians by improving sight lines and providing enough space to safely manoeuvre in and out of parking spaces.
- The safety and public domain improvements planned in our upgrade will remove parking spaces, however this loss of parking will be managed by introducing timed (not paid) parking, freeing up the spaces currently used as all-day parking for shoppers and visitors to businesses.
- We undertook a parking survey in May 2019 which indicated that the minimum number of vacant parking spaces available in a day is around 25 spaces. So, at other times of the day, more than 25 vacant spaces were available. The May 2019 survey identified that all day parking (minimum 8 hrs stay) by commuters or workers typically occupied 28 parking spaces – 21 in the western side road and 7 in the main through road (western side).
- We will make it safer for people to get in and out of parked vehicles by locating 90 degree and parallel parking on the quieter side roads, and by designing the new parking spaces to meet Australian Standards for safety.
- Parking on the western side of Orchardtown Road will be safely connected to the shops with a pedestrian crossing.
- In response to community feedback, we have provided an additional section of through road by removing parallel parking spaces between Blamey Avenue and Dunkley Avenue to allow for emergency vehicle access and to provide more space for manoeuvring vehicles.
- Following completion of the project, Blackbutt Village will still have a high ratio of public parking spaces per business compared to similar sized Local Centres in the Newcastle LGA.

How will the upgrade benefit businesses?

By creating safer connections to a larger range of timed parking spaces, visitors to businesses will have more parking options.

Shoppers arriving on foot or by bike will have safer entry to the shopping village, and cyclists will have bike racks for storing bikes.

The creation of an attractive pedestrian and cycle friendly precinct with outdoor plaza spaces will drive increased visitation and encourage people to stay for longer. Studies have shown a strong connection between increased foot traffic and increased business takings.

How will the centre look and feel different after the upgrade?

New elements will interpret the unique character of Blackbutt Village and celebrate its connection with Blackbutt Reserve. We will renew infrastructure including footpaths, roads, lighting, drainage and street furniture.

New trees, landscaping and communal design elements such as art and seating will be provided to make Blackbutt Village a welcoming and inviting place for visitors to sit, stay and relax. We will retain existing trees where possible, to maintain the green backdrop to the commercial area. Any trees that are removed will be replaced, and the overall layout offers a net increase in trees.

We will plant new trees within the widened footpath along the shop frontage to provide shade and greenery to pedestrians, and a pleasant environment for outdoor trading.

An avenue of trees is proposed along the main through road providing shade to parked cars and the proposed shared pedestrian and cycle path. The avenue will also help to slow through traffic.

Trees within the 90-degree parking area on the western side road will provide shade and greenery to parked cars and the proposed shared pedestrian and cycle path.

Overall, there is an increase in landscaping and greenery compared with the existing layout, which will improve the look and feel of the area and reduce heat in summer.

The 2019 survey highlighted a lack of spaces for people to gather. How is this being improved?

Two small public open spaces are proposed – one located outside Blackbutt Hotel and one adjacent Myra Street. These function as pedestrian entries to the row of shops, and also as gathering places where small scale activation can occur.

New trees, landscaping and communal design elements such as art and seating will be provided as part of an ongoing community placemaking process.

Placemaking is a collaborative design process that invites people to get involved in the creation and ongoing care of a communal outdoor space. As part of the process people share their ideas on how to provide for the needs of their community, and how to celebrate the character and heritage of their local area. This results in the creation of unique and special places where the community can meet and enjoy spending time.

Proposed footpath widening outside the shops will allow more outdoor trading to take place.

How will the upgrade improve connections to Blackbutt Reserve?

- A footpath connection to Carnley Avenue Reserve within Blackbutt Reserve will be provided on the northern side of Dunkley Avenue.
- A footpath connection to Richley Reserve within Blackbutt Reserve will be provided on the southern side of Freyberg Street.
- A new shared pedestrian and cycle path (shared path) on the western side of Orchardtown Road forms part of an important connection between Blackbutt Reserve and Kotara Train Station.
- Upgraded wayfinding signage will be provided to guide visitors between Blackbutt Village and Blackbutt Reserve. The design of Blackbutt Village will reflect its connection with Blackbutt Reserve

How does the upgrade improve safety and access for cyclists?

A shared pedestrian and cycle path is proposed for the western side of Orchardtown Road forming part of a cycle route connection between Blackbutt Reserve and Kotara Train Station. It forms an integral part of the broader Newcastle cycle network and the requirement for this off-road facility was identified in the Grinsell Street to Rydal Street cycle route study June 2017.

A 40km/hr High Pedestrian Activity Area (HPAA) with associated traffic calming devices on Orchardtown Road between Freyberg Street and Carnley Avenue will create a safer environment for cyclists.

We will remove the risk caused by vehicles manoeuvring into parking spaces in a busy traffic environment and drivers opening doors onto cyclists by relocating existing parallel parking from the busy main through road onto the quieter eastern one-way aisle and western side road.

What is the current status of construction?

Construction commenced in March 2022 and has been delivered in stages.

Construction of new footpaths and planting of street trees on the residential side streets of Freyberg Street and Dunkley Avenue is complete.

Work to upgrade drainage and improve access for pedestrians and shoppers in the western car park is mostly complete. Minor works in this area will continue over the coming months, including landscaping and signposting.

The upgrade of the eastern carpark has commenced, with work progressively moving across the carpark, expanding into pedestrian pavements and new landscaping. As the work progresses car spaces in this area will be intermittently closed. Safe pedestrian access between the shops and the western car park will continue to be available using the existing signalised crossing at the intersection of Carnley Avenue and Orchardtown Road.

The community and local businesses will be provided information on construction sequence and timing as the project progresses.

Works fronting the businesses in the main local centre area, including the carparking, shopfronts and footpaths are anticipated to be completed in early 2024.

Further works to upgrade the intersection and signals at Carnley Ave will be completed in the second half of 2024, pending Transport for NSW approvals. The creation of new community spaces at the corner of Myra Street and Carnley Avenue, in response to community feedback, are also scheduled to be completed in the second half of 2024. We anticipate the works scheduled later in 2024 will have limited impact on parking or access to the businesses.

Christmas trading period

There will be a construction shutdown period to support Christmas trading for businesses with no construction between 21 December and 2 January. Car park spaces previously closed for construction will be returned during this time.