

PROTECTING THE VIBE

A REPORT FROM THE NEWTOWN VIBE ROUNDTABLE

Produced by the Office of Jenny Leong MP, the Member for Newtown, and the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, in collaboration with Newtown Vibe Roundtable Participants

THE NEWTOWN VIBE ROUNDTABLE BEGAN IN RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY CONCERNS RAISED AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SYDNEY CBD AND KINGS CROSS LOCKOUTS. THE ROUNDTABLE HAS BEEN A FORUM FOR CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES RANGING FROM PLANNING, SAFETY, TRANSPORT AND AMENITIES TO EDUCATION, CULTURE AND CREATIVITY.

In August 2015 the Newtown Vibe Roundtable was established to develop initiatives to actively preserve the character and diversity of Newtown and to address concerns resulting from the introduction of the Sydney CBD and Kings Cross lockout laws, which were implemented in February 2014. Its main purpose was to monitor and promote the 'Newtown vibe' and to develop strategies to address issues as they were identified.

The Roundtable was established following a well-attended public meeting, initiated by the Member for Newtown Jenny Leong, in collaboration with the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, the Newtown Precinct Business Association and ACON. The meeting identified key concerns of local residents and businesses, which provided impetus for the development of a series of guiding principles and actions undertaken in the local area.

Roundtable participants have included representatives from the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Newtown Police, the Newtown Precinct Business Association, the Liquor Accord, ACON, Reclaim the Streets, the Inner West and City of Sydney Councils and the office of Jenny Leong MP, Member for Newtown.

It has met semi-regularly since the initial public meeting, to allow participants to provide updates to other stakeholders and to address issues as they have arisen.



Photo: Diana Shypula, Prema Photo

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NEWTOWN AND THE LOCKOUT LAWS

Newtown is a place known for being welcoming, eclectic, diverse, accepting, respectful, vibrant and fun.

It's a place where people feel comfortable to dance in the streets, to have a chat with a stranger, or to walk home alone late at night. It's a place where people are proud to identify as queer or trans or bi or none of the above. Newtown and surrounds have long been a place where people come to find a community.

Newtown is also a popular entertainment precinct outside of the lockout zone. The Newtown local precinct incorporates the hubs of North King St, South King St, Enmore Rd, and Erskineville Rd. Many licensed venues are found throughout the precinct, including live music and entertainment venues, pubs, small bars and licensed restaurants.

According to BOCSAR statistics, the number of non-domestic assaults recorded by NSW Police in Newtown and other suburbs surrounding the lockouts zone remained relatively stable in the initial period following the introduction of the Sydney lockouts.¹ The Newtown Local Area Command reported to the Roundtable that there had not been a noticeable increase in reported violent incidents through 2015-16. This was despite evidence, both statistical² and anecdotal, that there had been a significant increase in visitor numbers to the area.

¹ http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_pages/Alcohol_Related_Violence.aspx

² http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/250202/2015-541941-Report-Late-Night-Management-Areas-Research-Final.pdf

There was, however, significant anecdotal evidence that suggested that the increased numbers of visitors had had an impact on the sense of safety felt by many people in the Newtown area. This may have been because of an increase in incidents of low-level harassment that individuals believed did not warrant reporting.

More recent BOCSAR statistics³ show that there has been some displacement of non-domestic assaults to suburbs surrounding the lockouts zones, with an increase in the number of reported assaults in the 'proximal' and 'distal' displacement areas – which are groups of suburbs outside of the lockout zones that have popular entertainment precincts. Newtown is part of the 'distal' displacement area, which also includes Bondi Beach, Coogee, and Double Bay.

The BOCSAR Crime Tool, which maps crime by specific suburbs, shows that incidents of reported non-domestic assaults in Newtown have actually remained stable over the past 2 years.⁴

AIMS OF THE NEWTOWN VIBE ROUNDTABLE

The Newtown Vibe Roundtable began in response to community concerns raised after the implementation of the Sydney CBD and Kings Cross lockouts. The objectives of the Roundtable included:

- Providing a platform for on-going consultation with the local community.

³ <http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Documents/CJB/Report-2017-Effect-of-lockout-and-last-drinks-laws-on-non-domestic-assaults-cjb201.pdf>

⁴ <http://crimetool.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/bocsar/>

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- Developing initiatives to respond to increased visitor numbers and patronage of local venues.
- Developing programs and resources to contribute to community-building and raise awareness of issues around inclusion and respect.
- Monitoring safety concerns and anti-social behaviour in the local area.
- Allowing key stakeholders to exchange information and ideas, giving them the opportunity to use their distinct skills and local knowledge to address areas of concern.

The Roundtable has been a forum for the consideration of issues ranging from planning, safety, transport and amenities to education, culture and creativity.

PRINCIPLES OF THE ROUNDTABLE

The Roundtable endorsed the following guiding principles:

As the people who love to live, play and work in Newtown we want to ensure we protect the vibe of our diverse, inclusive, vibrant community.

We want to make sure we keep it weird, open and safe.

The Newtown Vibe is the character and spirit of Newtown – it's not something easy to describe or quantify – it is precious, but it isn't tangible - it is valuable, but isn't something that can be owned.

Sadly, it's also something that can be lost – unless we work together, collectively, to maintain and protect it.

Protecting the Newtown Vibe is all of our responsibility.

It is about respecting each other by being open, welcoming and inclusive. We want people to feel welcome when they visit Newtown and in return we expect them to respect the vibe of our community.

Newtown is unique, but not exclusive.

It is about celebrating difference and diversity – and weirdness. A place full of colourful characters, locally-run initiatives and creative cultural events and experiences.

OUTCOMES FROM THE ROUNDTABLE

There have been a number of actions and initiatives resulting from the Roundtable, most notably:

- **Collaboration, communication and responsiveness**

One of the aims of the Roundtable was to allow key stakeholders to exchange information and ideas, giving them the opportunity to use their distinct skills and local knowledge to address areas of concern.

The Roundtable has proven to be a successful collaboration and forum for ideas. While participants came from varied backgrounds and varied viewpoints, there was genuine desire to work in the best interests of the Newtown community.

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The Sydney lockouts have been a divisive issue and the subject of impassioned debate. However, Newtown hasn't been the subject of media beat-ups or frenzied commentary. There hasn't been a 'crisis' within our community, either real or perceived. By coming together as a group of community leaders, the Roundtable provided a calm and considered response to what could have been a heated situation.

- **Newtown Neighbourhood Centre activations in Newtown Square**

A number of regular live music events involving local artists and local makers, under the banner of 'Friday Night Vibes', occurred in Newtown Square on Friday evenings through summer and autumn. These activations aimed to encourage visitors to the area to engage with the diversity of Newtown in a positive way. Newtown locals volunteered as Newtown vibe "ambassadors", greeting people arriving from the train stations and welcoming them to "Newtopia". Additionally, the events provided a space for people to gather and socialise as an alternative to licenced venues. The public response to the Friday Night Vibes sessions was enthusiastic. The events were organised by the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre and funded by the City of Sydney Council.



Photo: Diana Shypula, Prema Photo

- **New taxi ranks**

A number of new taxi ranks are now in operation on King St. Roundtable participants recognise the need for adequate public transport to allow late-night visitors to quickly and safely leave the area at the end of their night out. Instrumental to establishing the new ranks, the City of Sydney's Late Night Transport Working Group has identified a location for a larger late night taxi rank that has higher visibility on King Street that is now operational. The group comprises representatives from NSW Police, RMS, Transport for NSW, NSW Taxi Council, NSW Taxi Operators & Drivers Association and City of Sydney Council.

- **Safer Bars training**

The City of Sydney funded training sessions facilitated by the industry-recognised Safer Bars program to 25 staff from 11 late-trading local venues. On advice from the Roundtable, future sessions will be tailored to the Newtown area and include extras such as diversity training from ACON, which addresses aggression and abuse arising from homophobia and transphobia.

- **Self-Imposed last entry times in Newtown venues**

In response to increased patronage and recognition that the CBD lockouts were dispersing late-night patrons to other areas of the city, Newtown venue owners agreed to trial a suite of self-imposed restrictions to confront possible alcohol-fuelled anti-social behaviour.

In July 2015, venues within the Newtown Liquor Accord agreed to implement a 3am curfew on new patrons and restrictions on the sale of shots and 'doubles' after midnight.

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The 3am curfew on new patrons was designed to discourage patrons ejected from venues within the lockout zone from travelling to Newtown in large numbers. The Liquor Accord agreement recognised that some patrons, such as staff from surrounding venues, may have reason to arrive after 3am, so offered an exemption to the curfew to patrons who contacted the venue ahead of their arrival to arrange entry.

The original six-month trial period has been extended and the self-imposed restrictions remain in place.

- **Way finding and signage**

Roundtable participants recognised the need for measures that would encourage the dispersal of patrons across the multitude of local venues, to avoid issues resulting from queues at the most well-known venues. They also recognised the need to provide fast and efficient access to public transport when patrons chose to leave the area.

Accordingly, Roundtable participants are collaborating to improve signage and way-finding within the local area.

FUTURE PLANS

Feedback from the community of people who live, work and play in and around Newtown will determine the future of the Vibe Roundtable. Throughout the time the Roundtable has been coming together, participants have agreed that the group should continue to respond to issues and concerns while they arise.

A second public meeting has been called for 15 March 2017. At that meeting the Roundtable will:

- report back on their work so far
- get an update from the Newtown community on the local 'vibe'
- to check in on whether more work needs to be done to address public safety concerns
- hear about new ideas or initiatives that can add to the vibrancy and inclusion of our local area

COVERAGE OF THE ROUNDTABLE

[Note from the initial public meeting held 6 July 2015](#)

[Push for late night taxi rank for King St, Newtown to reduce alcohol related violence](#)

- Inner West Courier, 26 August 2015

[Tackling violence without lockouts](#)

- City News, 3 March 2016

[Figures show alcohol-related assaults in Newtown were down 40 per cent in January compared to same time last year](#)

- Inner West Courier, 6 April 2016

[Newtown community leaders take proactive steps to maintain the area's vibrant night-life](#)

- Inner West Courier, 4 March 2016

[Police, publicans unite to prevent hate crimes as lockout laws bring booming business to Newtown](#)

- Inner West Courier, 20 September 2016

[Speech on Protecting the Newtown Vibe – Jenny Leong MP](#)

- NSW Parliament, 7 March 2017

['Newtown Vibe' at the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre](#)

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WANT TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS?

Let us know what you think about the mood in Newtown and give us your ideas for keeping our community safe and vibrant at jennyleong.org/newtown_your_say

You can sign up to stay updated on future plans and activities, as well as leave your thoughts and suggestions.

CONTACT DETAILS

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