

James Street Plaza, Hamilton Local Centre Upgrade

Last updated: June 2021



Why are we upgrading James Street Plaza?

In February 2018 the elected Council resolved to produce a masterplan for James Street Plaza in consultation with the Hamilton Business Improvement Association (BIA) to address issues including:

- **Antisocial and criminal behaviour** in and around the plaza, strongly associated with the existing Telstra phone box and public toilets. There is also graffitied seats and tables, and oppressive dark brick paving and building walls which lead to many user groups feeling uncomfortable in the Plaza, especially at night.
- **Poor design**, contributing to a lack of safety. Existing street furniture including the large concrete art-seat, trees and other barriers contribute to a large semi-permanent puddle (named Lake Beaumont by locals), and act as a physical and visual barrier to the Plaza from Beaumont Street. This reduces passive surveillance, making the space unsafe for those within it. Lighting levels are also poor, exacerbated by the low deciduous tree canopy in summer. Existing trees have lifted the brick pavers in many places, creating trip hazards and puddling. Further some of the trees appear to be in poor health, with growth potentially stunted given the length time they have been growing in the Plaza.
- The Plaza's **condition** – it was last renewed in the early 1990s, and much of the infrastructure is now in poor condition and due for replacement.

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

We have been working with local businesses, residents and visitors since 2019 on plans to revitalise James Street Plaza. In July 2019 we ran a series of engagement activities with people who live, work and play in Hamilton to come up with ideas to revitalise the local plaza to ensure we developed a masterplan that meets the needs of the community and benefits all stakeholders.

From these activities, we heard that having spaces for performances and markets, and creative art and lighting were important in activating the space. Provision of public toilets was also seen as important, as were trees and plants, maintaining the community atmosphere, discouraging anti-social behaviour and seating.

Following this feedback, we prepared two concepts for James Street Plaza. Both concepts aimed to provide a safe and inclusive space for everyone to enjoy, including:

- Creation of a flexible multi-use meeting space for the whole community.
- Public art and heritage interpretation to encourage activation.
- Retention of trees and shade.
- Landscaping and gardens.
- Improved design for safety including better lighting at night.

The two concepts were on public exhibition for community comment from November 2019 to January 2020. Over 130 people provided feedback, with the Modern Town Square concept receiving the most support. This concept was adopted by Council in February 2020.

How will the re-design improve safety and reduce antisocial behaviour?

- Passive surveillance into the site will be improved by removing existing clutter including bins, signage, seating, and trees that currently create a visual and physical barrier between the Plaza and Beaumont Street. New seating will be in positions that provide good passive surveillance of the Plaza space.
- New garden beds will define and control access to the busy Beaumont Street roadway from the footpath for pedestrian safety and to support the health and improved growth of trees.
- Vehicle access to the Plaza will be controlled using removable bollards.
- The Telstra phone box will be removed. Alternative phone boxes are located on Lindsay Street and Tudor Street.
- Lighting will be upgraded, and smart features including Wi-Fi will enable varied use of the space.
- Increased activation of the Plaza day and night will aid in reducing antisocial behaviour.

What are the main features of the design?

The design creates an open space which lends itself to multiple uses, with seating around the edges under the shade of existing trees.

New artwork will be installed including etchings in the renewed pavers and on pillars that acknowledge and celebrate Hamilton's rich history. We will also install an interactive lighting feature which will activate the space after dark.

How did you develop the concept for the artworks?

Our project team worked closely with Ruth Cotton, local social historian, and author of *Hidden Hamilton*. We created a list of figures, places, groups and events with historical importance to the Hamilton community. These include:

Ahwar-tah Bulboolba	Awabakal phrase meaning "flat it is, Wallaby place".
Edward T Hamilton 1824 - 1875	Governor of AA Company at the time of Hamilton's incorporation in 1871.
Borehole	Originally there were three settlements around the mine at 'D' Pit – Borehole, Pit Town and Happy Flat.
Fettercairn	A stately late-Victorian style home in Lindsay Street, built in 1903 by Raymond Gow. After Fettercairn passed out of the Gow family hands it became a private hospital, hence many thousands of Novocastrians have had some association with it, and rich memories.
Dave Sands 1926 – 1952	An Indigenous Australian boxer who trained for years at Tom Maguire's gym at 187 Beaumont Street in the 1940s.
Lettopalena	An Italian village virtually destroyed in fierce conflict during WW2, in the Abruzzo region. Extended family members of some 145 households where one or both partners were born in Lettopalena settled in the Hamilton area between 1950 and 1956.
AA Company	The Company owned all the land on which Hamilton was established, after being given the right to select one million acres of land in NSW for agriculture and coal mining.
Fred Barrie's Furniture	Situated at 52 Beaumont Street and beginning in his parents' laundry there, Fred Barrie's quality, customised cedar furniture can still be found in countless Newcastle homes.

<i>Turkish Baths</i>	The Hamilton Turkish Baths were built in 1879 by Francis W Reay and located at 15-21 Denison Street.
<i>1989 Earthquake</i>	The centre of Hamilton especially Beaumont Street was badly affected. Three of the 13 people who died lost their lives in Beaumont Street. The earthquake led the way to a major rebuilding of the Hamilton business district, changing its streetscape forever.
<i>Blacksmiths shop</i>	There was a blacksmith's workshop at 162 Beaumont Street from 1901 until 1995. For seventy years, horses were shod and metal 'tyres' on wooden wheels of horse-drawn vehicles were repaired here.

In developing this list, we also collaborated with the team at Newcastle Museum, given their long-standing exhibition celebrating Hamilton's history and personal stories from the 1989 earthquake.

What will the lighting display look like?

We have collaborated with the University of Newcastle to develop concept options for the lighting display which will be installed towards the end of our construction period. We are currently seeking community feedback on these options – feedback is open between 2 June and 16 June 2021. Voting is in person at drop-in sessions on site on Friday 4 June and Saturday 5 June or online at newcastle.nsw.gov.au/yoursay

Details of the thinking behind each lighting design option is available on our website.

The lighting option with the most votes will be developed into a full-length animation for display against the wall of the ANZ Bank after dark. The lighting is intended to create a point of interest and aid in attracting people and improving safety in the Plaza after dark.

How else will the upgrade attract people to the Plaza?

Reconfiguring street furniture and removing certain trees will open up the Plaza space for a range of uses including markets and small events, as well as live music and other performances.

When is the upgrade being delivered?

Our works commence on Monday 19th April. Some early works may occur in the week prior, to help prepare the site for construction.

We expect works to be completed by mid 2021, subject to weather and site conditions.

What can I expect during construction?

During our works fencing will be in place to ensure community safety. Please follow directional signage on site. Pedestrian access to the ANZ Bank and Clocktower Café will be maintained at all times.

There will be some noise during our works and efforts will be made to minimise disruption where possible. Access to the public toilet will be maintained, and an alternative will be made available during any temporary closure of the permanent facilities.

Parking and loading zones on James Street near the Murray Street intersection may be restricted during the works, so please check signage for any temporary changes to restrictions. Disabled parking on James Street near the Plaza will not be impacted.