

Unity Place

Places to Love Case Study:
Burwood Council

A vibrant new linear plaza connecting
Burwood Library and Community Hub





Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past and present.

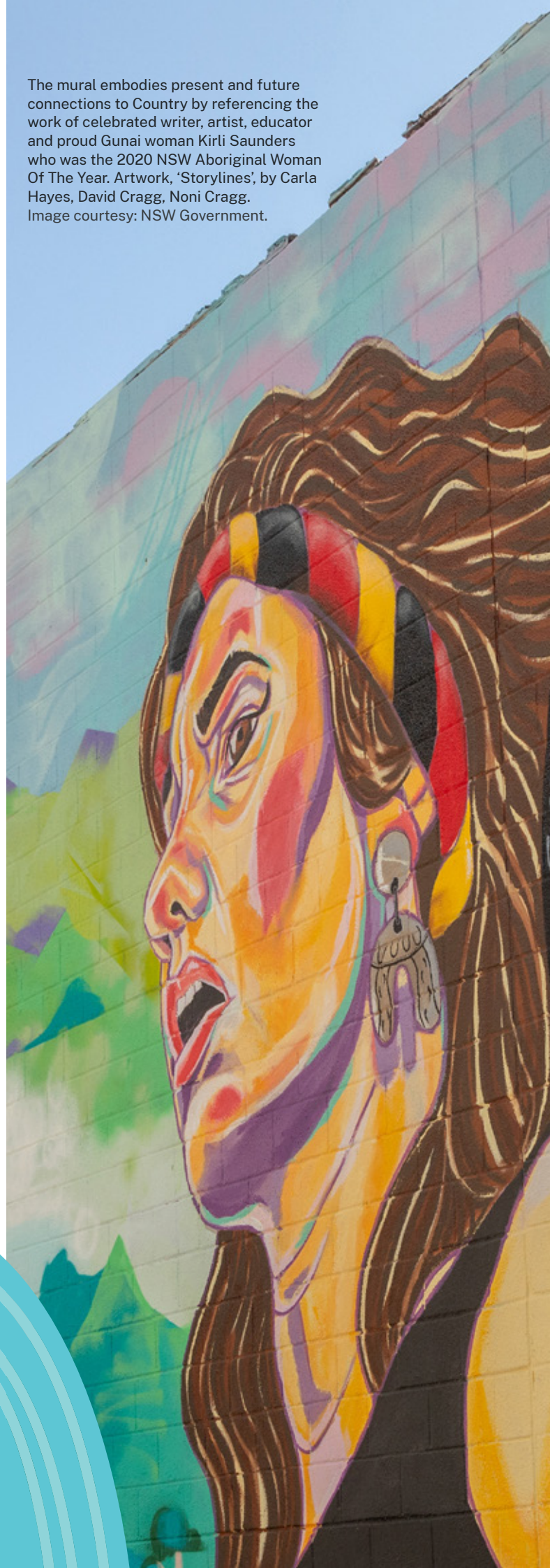
We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Aboriginal peoples take a holistic view of land, water and culture and see them as one, not in isolation to each other. This Places to Love Case Study is based on the premise upheld by Aboriginal peoples that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

Contents

Project at a glance	4
Project description	6
Community and stakeholder engagement	10
Evaluation	11
Timeline	12
Cost breakdown	12
Outcomes and lessons learnt	13
Photo diary	14

The mural embodies present and future connections to Country by referencing the work of celebrated writer, artist, educator and proud Gunai woman Kirli Saunders who was the 2020 NSW Aboriginal Woman Of The Year. Artwork, 'Storylines', by Carla Hayes, David Cragg, Noni Cragg. Image courtesy: NSW Government.





Project at a glance

Unity Place is a new pedestrian link in the centre of Burwood, creating additional community space and connection to the Burwood Library and Community Hub.

This case study outlines the approach that Council and the NSW Government took in partnership to transform Hornsey Lane from a car access lane into Unity Place, a vibrant place for people.

Project vision

To provide a new people-friendly linear plaza connecting the town centre with the Burwood Library and Community Hub, and to provide engaging public art, landscaping and programming that attracts people and enhances public life.

Places to Love

Places to Love is a collaborative program between NSW Government and councils to trial demonstration projects that improve walkable access to, and the quality of, local public spaces, particularly in streets and transport hub precincts.

In 2020-21, six councils partnered with the program, including Burwood Council for the reimagining of the CBD.

These demonstration projects trial quick and low cost approaches to make public spaces more vibrant and active using pop-ups and semi-permanent changes to test ideas and build the case for longer-term change.

Places to Love is a rolling program with opportunities for other councils to be involved in the future.



Interactive light installations, Unity Place.
Image courtesy: Mike Belkin for Burwood Council.

What was implemented?

1,711 m² of activated public space

19 new shade trees **3** new murals

141 m of continuous walking space

2,000+ people attended the Unity Place community day

520 new small plants and flowers

90% of respondents voted for the name Unity Place in a renaming competition

Key outcomes

Before the transformation, no pedestrians were recorded using the area during the baseline evaluation. The Evaluation Tool survey results showed over 100 people per hour either moving through or staying in the area after project completion.

The renaming and community event created a sense of community pride in the new lane. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Council has a proven approach to maximising the impact and benefits of smaller open spaces and has identified opportunities to implement similar projects that can help maximise the provision of quality public open space in the Burwood local government area (LGA).

Unity Place Community Day April 2021. Burwood Council programmed the laneway throughout the day and night with performers, public art, live music, diverse cultural entertainment, pop-up library programming and food vans. Image courtesy: NSW Government.



Project description

Aims and objectives

- Improve walkability through the Burwood Town Centre, by supporting the network of pedestrian connections throughout the city centre.
- Create and activate a continuous public space that connects to the existing pedestrian link between Burwood Plaza and Emerald Square.
- Encourage safe streets and active transport.
- Provide opportunities for seating and outdoor dining, strengthening neighbourhood interactions.
- Provide urban canopy cover and increase shade to help mitigate the urban heat island effect.
- Test library pop-up programming outside in the laneway, and trial temporary seating and artwork.
- Engage the community to rename the lane, help activate the space, and to gain feedback to build the case for long-term change from an unusable space into a place for people.

The Places to Love program delivered the following activities:

- High-quality landscaping, permanent and temporary furniture, tree planting, hanging flower baskets, bunting, banners and festoon lighting on new smart poles.
- Three large-scale murals along a 50m wall telling the story of the Burwood area's past, present and future.
- Community engagement through stalls, a lane renaming competition and a community launch event that included a pop-up library in the lane.

The plaza development allows programming and events that, in the short-term, can encourage public space activation and support businesses in a COVID-safe way for the community, while aligning with Council strategic goals in the long-term as a catalyst for the urban transformation of Burwood Town Centre.



The project transformed Hornsey Lane from a car park access lane with a painted pedestrian crossing into a vibrant place for people renamed Unity Place. Image courtesy: NSW Government.



From a laneway and car park entry to a place for everyone to enjoy, this project has been transformational. Especially important following the COVID-19 pandemic, a high-quality public open space at Unity Place is vital to our community and will continue to be used as inspiration for future activations and open spaces.



Councillor John Faker,
Mayor of Burwood



Burwood Council is always thinking outside of the box in order to create new multi-purpose open spaces in the Town Centre. We are proud of what we have achieved together; our collaboration has seen the creation of an inspiring space that our community will love for many years to come.



Tommaso Briscese,
General Manager, Burwood Council



Project location

Burwood is a strategic centre located midway between Sydney CBD and Parramatta in the Eastern City District of metropolitan Sydney, spanning across 7 km².

Unity Place is located in the southern section of central Burwood. It connects Emerald Square and Burwood Plaza at Wynne Avenue to the Burwood Library and Community Hub and Burwood Public School at Conder Street.

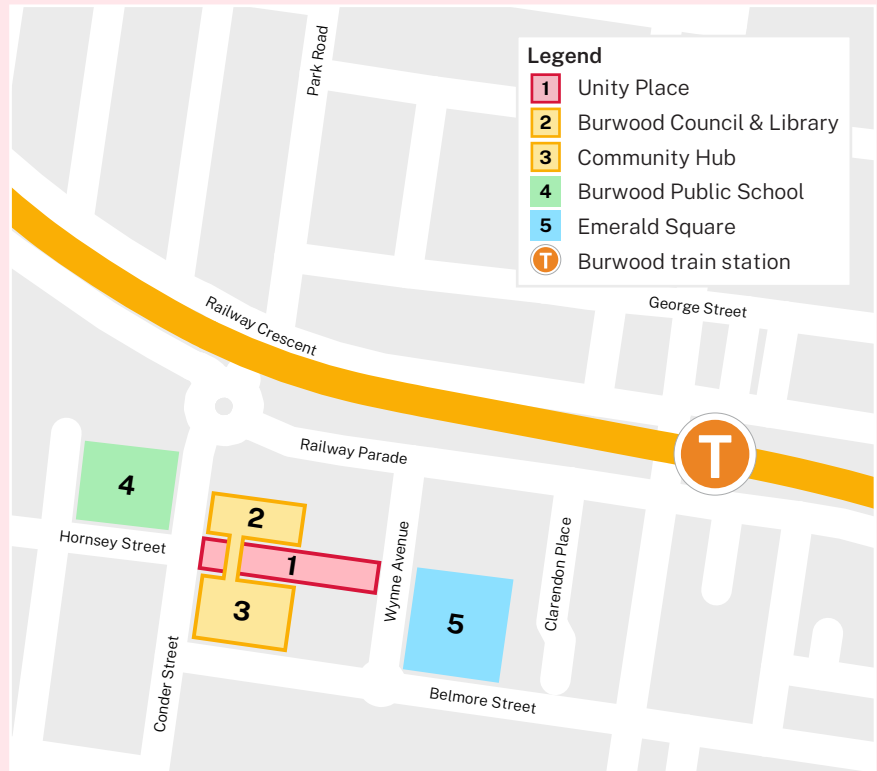


Figure 2: Site map of Unity Place.

Strategic alignment

Burwood is a rapidly growing, culturally diverse LGA.

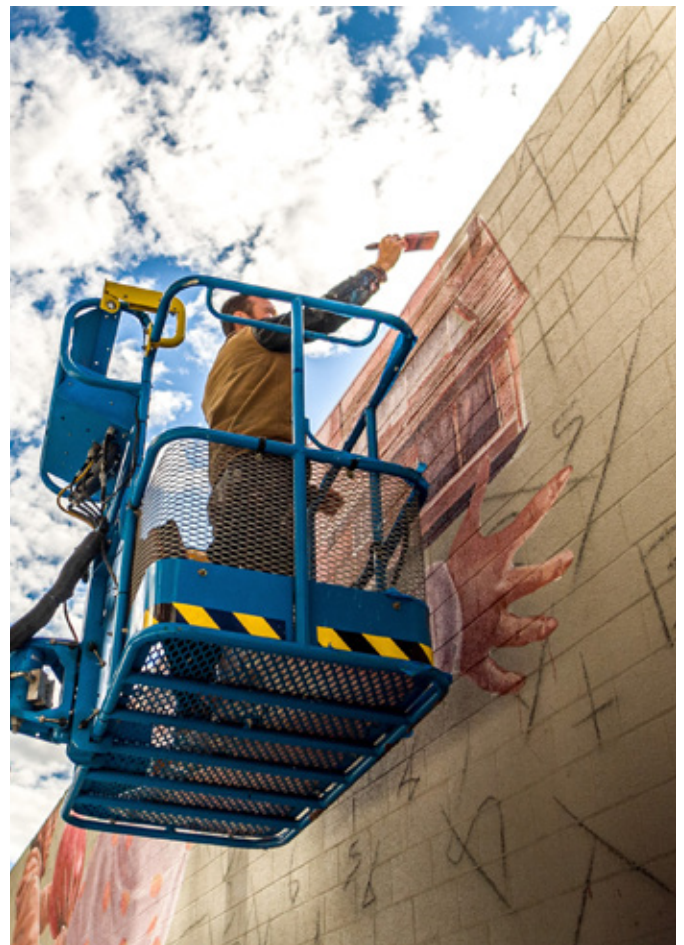
Burwood Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement highlights that it is among the LGAs with the lowest amount of public open space per person in metropolitan Sydney.

This is further supported by the Burwood Community Facilities and Open Space Strategy 2019 that identifies a need to provide additional open space and community spaces.

The Burwood Development Control Plan Public Domain Strategy identifies a pedestrian link and public square forecourt between Wynne Avenue and Conder Street in the town centre. This link is also identified in the Burwood Urban Design Study and Masterplan.

The project concept, design and delivery was enabled through the determination of the Mayor, Councillors and technical Council staff who, through a collaborative partnership with adjacent site owners at 39-47 Belmore Street (Burwood Grand), agreed to facilitate this ambitious project through a Voluntary Planning Agreement.

The NSW Government contributions allowed for additional place infrastructure and embellishments, greater community engagement and activation to test concepts that improve walkability and create a welcoming environment for the diverse community.



Public art mural 'Levitate' being painted by the artist Fintan Magee. This mural explores concepts for the future of Burwood. Image courtesy: Burwood Council.

Design and delivery

Burwood Council engaged the services of an urban design and landscape architecture consultancy to prepare the laneway design. The concept plan proposed permanent and temporary furniture and public art, soft and hard landscaping, and new smart poles.

Approvals were processed efficiently as part of the Development Application for 39-47 Belmore Street (Burwood Grand), and included approvals for closing the street and constructing the new laneway.

Council also managed approvals for the activation events and public art in the lane by following established Council approval processes.

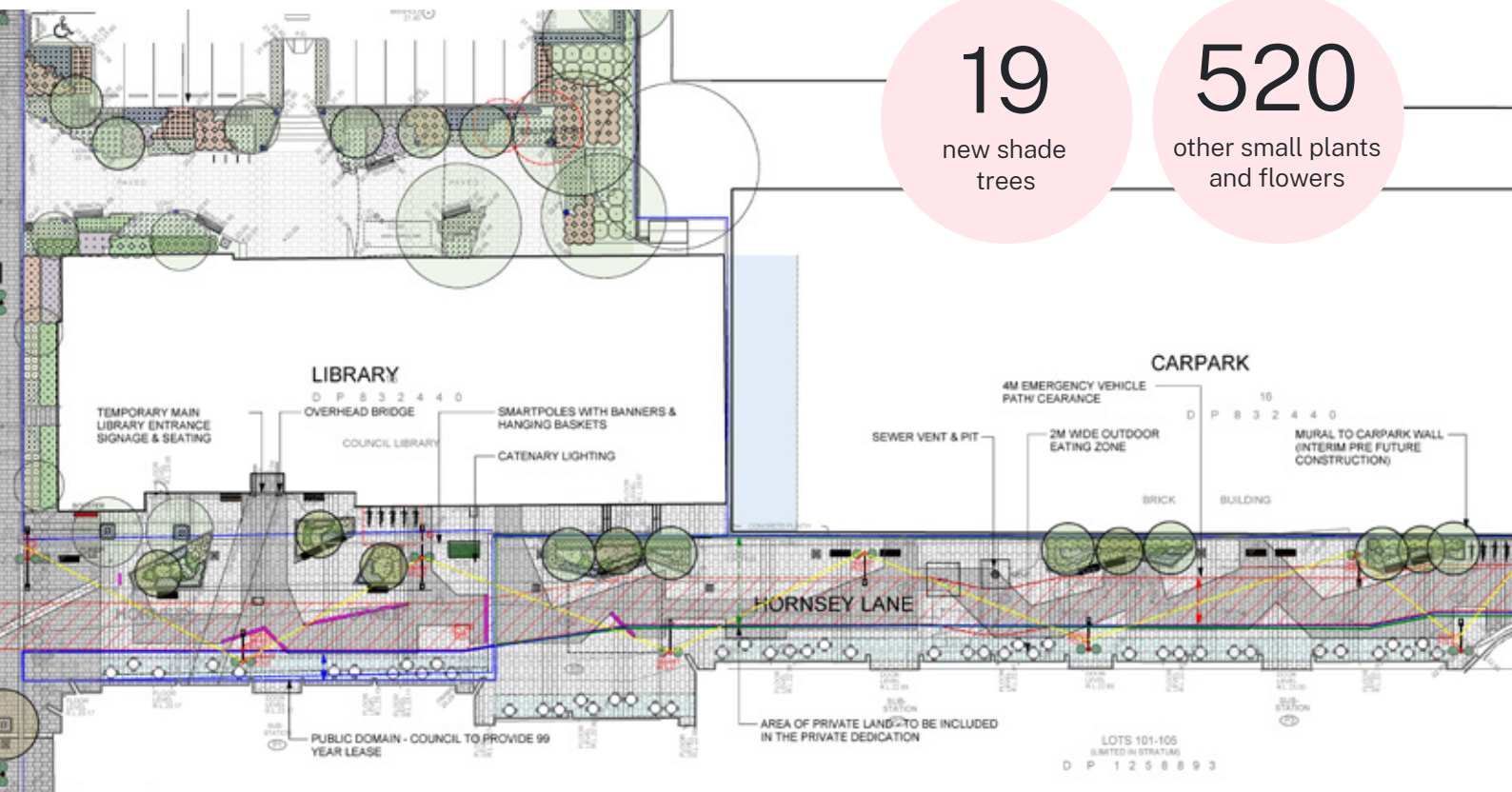
Originally, it was anticipated the project would be completed by December 2020. This was not possible due to COVID-19 related delays and restrictions on community gatherings. Instead, the project was completed in May 2021.

Project opportunities

- Increase open space provision and enhance the status of Burwood Library and Community Hub as a civic destination.
- Enhance pedestrian connections (permeability and walkability), natural surveillance and the general aesthetic look and feel of Unity Place.
- Bring library programming outside.
- Improve employment opportunities and business engagement through an activated laneway.

Project constraints

- Limited budget.
- Adherence to construction program of third-party developer.
- Physical constraints of underground infrastructure and services such as Sydney Water sewer line and vent.
- COVID-19 exacerbating difficulties in leasing new retail spaces and timing of launch events.



Landscape concept plan for the new Unity Place. Courtesy of Burwood Council

Community and stakeholder engagement

A community and stakeholder engagement plan was developed in consultation with Council and NSW Government engagement teams to ensure coordinated messaging to community and stakeholders.

Starting in 2019, Burwood Council and NSW Government explored initial ideas for a collaborative public space at the Burwood Festival in Burwood Park. The NSW Government held a stall to seek feedback from the community on how to improve their local public spaces, asking what public spaces they loved and what were their big ideas to improve public space in the area.

Renaming competition

The community engagement campaign for renaming Hornsey Lane was a key part of the activation and engagement phase of the project.

The community was invited to enter by completing an online survey. Entries to the naming competition were open to all residents and visitors to the Burwood LGA. A total of 168 participants submitted names from 30 November 2020 to 31 January 2021.

Many activities were undertaken to encourage people to submit names for the lane. This included: naming competition brochures; letters and a video from the Mayor; face-to-face engagement; engagement with youth groups; focus groups; a webpage; social media; and an online survey.

After the name suggestions were in, the community was invited to vote for their favourite name via an online portal with 'Unity Place' being the most popular choice.

2,515+

votes were received to rename the lane

Over 90%

of the community voted for **Unity Place**.



Community engagement in Burwood Park during the 2019 Burwood Festival. The ideas from the community informed the activations at Unity Place, such as, a trial library pop-up with activities for children. Image courtesy: NSW Government.

Evaluation

Data collection for this project included the NSW Government's Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life (Evaluation Tool). Evaluation Tool surveys were completed during construction, after the public opening and during the community day. The Evaluation Tool was used after the community day activation to observe how people continued to use the space.

Data analysis shows that Hornsey Lane was not a pedestrian-friendly area before its transformation to Unity Place. The pedestrian data collected before the project showed people were unable to use the space. During construction, data indicated that people were walking to the surrounding lanes.

After opening, there was an average of 48 people per hour using the space as a thoroughfare. After activation, this increased to an average of 56 people per hour moving and 48 people per hour staying. Evaluation Tools completed on the community day recorded an average of 732 people per hour.

The project included an initial background analysis of Burwood LGA in 2020, using open-source digital data from Google, social media and Uber, analysed and presented spatially by Neighbourlytics. The results of this analysis indicated Burwood had a thriving local economy and was well serviced for the community to meet their daily needs with high levels of education services and destinations.



Burwood Council and NSW Government staff visited the project area to use the Evaluation Tool. These site visits recorded data for the project and were opportunities to critique the tool for improvements and provide feedback to the NSW Government. Image courtesy: Burwood Council.

Timeline

Background

2012

Burwood Development Control Plan identified the need for a pedestrian link

2015

Burwood Grand Development Application submitted and included a Voluntary Planning Agreement for a laneway

2019

Council and the NSW Government test the draft Evaluation Tool for Public Space and Public Life, and hold a community stall at the Burwood Festival to inform the future partnership project

Project

2020

July
Places to Love partnership established

March – September
Landscaping construction including civil and irrigation works

July – August
Landscaping embellishment installed including three public art murals

September
Laneway made publically accessible

November – February 2021
Community engagement with laneway renaming competition

2021

April
Community day celebrating the renaming of Unity Place, including library activations in the laneway

2022

The newly created shop and cafe spaces along the laneway were activated with tenants

Ongoing community use of the new public space

Cost breakdown

Description of activities	NSW Government	Council Contribution
Detailed design		\$338,000
Civil works preparation of planting areas, excavation, supply and pavers		
Irrigation works including underground pump, tank and filtration system		
Landscape works, furniture, tree planting, hanging flower baskets, banners and festoon lights/bunting on new smart poles, and three major public art murals over 50m	\$100,000	\$250,000
Community engagement activities including renaming competition, launch event, pop-up library and art installations	\$30,000	
Approximate totals	\$130,000	\$588,000

The NSW Government's [Summer Fund](#) contributed an additional **\$10,000** towards artwork activations that were embraced during the community day.



New landscaping below the public art mural 'Present' by artist Georgia Hill. Images courtesy: NSW Government.

Outcomes and lessons learnt

At approximately 10 m² of open space per person, Burwood LGA has one of the lowest provisions of open space in metropolitan Sydney. Unity Place is a proven and successful approach to maximise the impact and benefits of smaller open spaces that can help address the LGA's shortfall.

Some of the key challenges of this project included:

- Beautification of a functional lane with operational character, e.g. structural and underground services.
- Planning for and holding events for the community in a time of changing Public Health Order requirements of physical distancing and maximum capacities.

Looking forward, Council can build on key lessons learnt in future public space projects such as:

- Flexibility in adapting to changing requirements, allowing the project to move forward.
- Temporary installations of public art murals, food and beverage, and pop-up programming like bringing the library outside can be delivered more quickly and affordably.
- The renaming event helped to build community pride in the new and activated cultural link.

1,711 m² of newly activated public space

141 m length of continuous new walking space was created

The community day was held on 17 April 2021, during a COVID-19 Public Health Order period that allowed large groups to gather. It was an overwhelming success, with more than 2000 community members coming together in large numbers to celebrate.

Watch the video of the [launch event](#).

The Unity Place Community Day included vibrant public art and activations in the lane delivered by the library staff brought the library outside and invited play. Images courtesy Burwood Council.



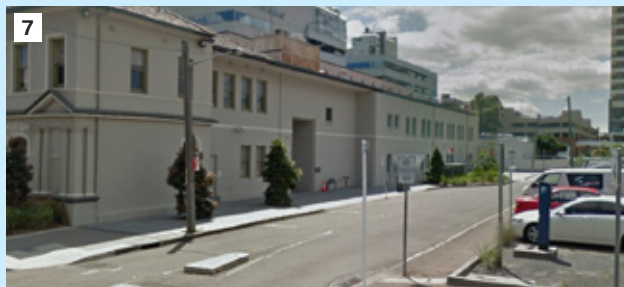
Photo diary

The photographs on this page document the transformation of Unity Place into an activated laneway with space for people to relax, for pop-up activations and for programming run by the library.

The laneway is now a cultural destination, activating the local area and encouraging people to enjoy spending time in their new quality public space.

Hornsey Lane (Before)

Unity Place (After)



- 1. **Before** – Aerial.
- 2. **After** – Aerial.
- 3. **Before** – Project construction.
- 4. **After** – Project completion.
- 5. **Before** – Project construction; the blank wall on the left became the space for three large murals.

- 6. **After** – One of three large murals to activate the blank wall. 'Storylines' by Karla Hayes, David Cragg, Noni Cragg.
- 7. **Before** – No pedestrian access through the block.
- 8. **After** – An activated laneway and through-link for walking.

1, 2 Images courtesy of Copyright Metromap. 3, 5 Images courtesy of Burwood Council. 4, 6, Images courtesy of NSW Government. 7 Image courtesy of Google Maps. 8 Image courtesy of Mike Belkin for Burwood Council.



Unity Place K-pop girls in the new Unity Place plaza.
Image courtesy: Burwood Council

NSW Government

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This publication recognises the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and makes reference to project outcomes during the 2020-21 period. The State of New South Wales, the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.

Image on front cover:
Interactive light installations, Unity Place.
Image courtesy: Mike Belkin for Burwood Council.

Resources



For more information, please visit [Burwood Council](#)



Check out the video on Facebook for the [Unity Place Community Day](#)



Visit our website to learn more about the [Great Places Toolkit](#) or email PublicSpace@planning.nsw.gov.au