

COUNCIL REPORT

12.2 COBURG LIBRARY AND PIAZZA LOCATION

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Cultural Development

Pursuant to section 3(1)(c) of the Local Government Act 2020 this report has been designated as confidential because it relates to land use planning information, being information that if prematurely released is likely to encourage speculation in land values.

Officer Recommendation

That Council:

1. Endorses the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site as the location for the Coburg Library and Piazza.
2. Explores the feasibility of basement car parking underneath the library and/or piazza.
3. Following the adoption of this resolution, makes the resolution and this report publicly available and publishes the report on Councils website.

REPORT

Executive Summary

In 2023, an extensive community engagement program was undertaken about central Coburg. This engagement provided valuable insights from the community which demonstrated that there is a strong demand for both the renewal of Coburg Library and for new green and open spaces to be established in the area.

In 2024 Council endorsed 'Revitalising Coburg: Objectives' which set out six key areas for change, including objectives to develop both a new library in the heart of Coburg and new inviting public spaces. These objectives guided the visioning and scoping work for a new Coburg Library and Piazza.

In February 2025 Council endorsed the vision, objectives, scope, funding and procurement methodology of a design competition for a multistorey Coburg library redevelopment co-located with a new piazza. The southern end of the Council-owned Waterfield Street West site was identified as the proposed preferred location of the development. A limited consultation was undertaken to inform the community and key stakeholders on the project, including vision, scope and preferred location.

After site analysis and technical investigations of Council owned land in central Coburg, the preferred location for the Coburg Library and Piazza has been established as the south-eastern portion of the Council-owned Waterfield Street West site. This area is central and high-profile and close to accessible transport links, ensuring that the development would be well situated as a catalyst project for broader revitalisation in central Coburg.

Following endorsement, Council will run a design competition which will see a draft concept design for a new Coburg Library and Piazza presented for endorsement in 2026. Community consultation on the draft concept design will be undertaken in early 2026.

Previous Council Decisions

The Coburg Library and Piazza Project – 12 February 2025

That Council:

1. *Endorses the vision, objectives and scope for a new Coburg Library and Piazza as outlined in Attachment 1.*

2. *Investigates the southern part of the Waterfield Street West site as the potential preferred location for the Coburg Library and Piazza.*
3. *Receives a report at the April 2025 Council meeting on the outcomes of further site location exploration and a recommended site for the Coburg Library and Piazza.*
4. *Endorses the indicative financial modelling to be undertaken for the upcoming Council 10-year Financial Plan which supports a funding strategy of up to \$60 million, and:*
 - a) *Notes that the funding strategy comprises of a mixture of reserves and borrowings and explores opportunities to derive revenue from the existing library site once it is no longer needed as a library building, either through sale or long-term commercial lease and utilising the proceeds as a part of the funding strategy.*
 - b) *Refers the indicative funding strategy of up to \$60 million to the 2025-2029 budget process.*
5. *Endorses the commencement of a design competition to procure the Coburg Library and Piazza concept design, and notes that a draft concept design will be returned for Council consideration and endorsement following the design competition and prior to community engagement.*
6. *Continues to advocate to Federal and State Government, as well as any other appropriate funders, for grants and funds to realise the project.*

The Coburg Conversation engagement findings and precinct objectives – 10 April 2024

That Council:

1. *Notes the feedback provided from the community about the future of central Coburg captured in 'The Coburg Conversation – Summary of Community Engagement for Revitalising Coburg' (Attachment 2)*
2. *Thanks the many community members, local groups businesses and organisations who took the time to share their views and ideas for the future of the area*
3. *Amends objective 5 on page 29 in Attachment 1 to this report adding the italicised words to read:*

Safe, green, inviting, and accessible journeys that link key destinations and open space, and all types of transport to, from and within the precinct, giving clear priority to pedestrians, cyclists and those living with mobility issues.
4. *Includes the concept of a community centre as part of the Coburg Library project in the next round of community consultation on Revitalising Coburg. Such a community centre would include a kitchen that the public is allowed to use, a shower and lockers, an additional meeting room or rooms, which could facilitate the Library opening up this additional space during extreme heat periods.*
5. *Adopts 'Revitalising Coburg: Objectives', that sets out Council's high-level objectives for achieving the revitalisation of central Coburg, (Attachment 1) and will act as a guide for the next stage of detailed planning for this program.*

1. Policy Context

Council Plan 2021-2025

- Theme 1: An environmentally proactive Merri-bek
 - Strategy 1.1: Lead by example and partner with others to accelerate the shift to zero carbon emissions in energy, transport and waste in ways that are efficient, financially responsible, healthy and socially fair

- Theme 3: A healthy and caring Merri-bek
 - Strategy 3.2: Strategically invest in Council's community services and assets to increase our resilience and adapt to climate change risks and impacts that are now unavoidable (such as severe heatwaves, flash flooding, unreliable rainfall)
- Theme 4: Vibrant spaces and places in Merri-bek
 - Strategy 4.9: To revitalise Merri-bek's major activity centres to deliver new integrated community facilities and services, enable new cultural spaces, create jobs and improve local accessibility and amenity, while protecting the special character that each centre is known for and advocating for affordable housing outcomes
- Major Initiative 25: Revitalise the Coburg Activity Centre

Council Action Plans

- 2024-25 – Carry out research, technical studies, strategic planning, partnership building, engagement planning and affordable housing, to guide the future of central Coburg

Library Services Strategy 2019

- Place: Planning and advocating for quality, flexible spaces for our community to learn, discover and connect

Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan 2022-2032

- Plan to redevelop Coburg Library as part of the Coburg Square urban renewal precinct, including:
 - Upgrading and expanding the flagship municipal Library service
 - Maximising integration with community service providers, the public realm and Coburg Train Station

Merri-bek Arts and Culture Strategy 2023 – 2030

- Investment: Investment in arts and cultural spaces to support the local community of artists, audiences and the creative industries

Merri-bek Open Space Strategy 2024

- Council is also exploring open space needs in central Coburg near the Coburg Train Station as part of the Heart of Coburg project [Central Coburg Program], which will likely see the creation of new housing and business in this dense part of the suburb, which will likely see the creation of new housing and business in this dense part of the suburb

Sustainable Building Policy 2024

- Deliver efficient fossil-fuel free (all-electric) buildings which incorporate the circular economy and climate resilience while reducing operational costs and providing safe and comfortable spaces for all building users

Zero Carbon Merri-bek – Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020-2025

- Action 2.6 - Ensure Council builds highly energy efficient facilities, including onsite renewables and 'no new fossil gas'

Climate Risk Strategy and Foundational Action Plan 2023-2025

- Objective 2.1 - To improve the climate adaptation and resilience of new and existing high-priority Council infrastructure to support the delivery of Council services

- Objective 2.2 - To improve the climate adaptation and resilience of new and existing high-priority Council open spaces and natural environments to support community wellbeing, deliver ecosystems services, and protect plant and animal health
- Objective 3.1 - To build the resilience of essential Council services to ensure service continuity through chronic and extreme climate events

Revitalising Coburg: Objectives 2024

- Objective 1 - A new library in the heart of Coburg

A new leading library and cultural facility that is a place of welcome, learning, creativity and social connection for our diverse community. Climate-resilient, multifunctional and adaptable for varied experiences

- Objective 2 - New inviting public spaces

A new piazza, square or gathering space that acts as the main meeting and people watching place for Coburg, as well as other well integrated and well maintained

Public spaces that provide a variety of opportunities for refuge, play, and connection to nature

2. Background

Council has long held aspirations to revitalise central Coburg, where it owns large parcels of land including car parks, the existing library, and two supermarket sites. The Council Plan 2021 – 2025 included actions to develop a change program for these sites in central Coburg.

An extensive community engagement project known as the Coburg Conversation was undertaken in late 2023. Over 1300 people from Merri-bek's diverse communities participated and shared their views on the future of the area. Questions around possibilities for a renewed Coburg Library formed a central part of the engagement program.

In April 2024 Council endorsed 'Revitalising Coburg: Objectives' which set out six key areas for change including to develop both a new library in the heart of Coburg and new inviting public spaces. These objectives guided the visioning and scoping work for a new Coburg Library and Piazza project.

In February 2025 Council endorsed the vision, objectives, scope and funding for a new library and piazza, alongside a design competition. Council also endorsed the investigation of the southern part of the Waterfield Street West site as the potential preferred location for the library and piazza, and to receive a report at a subsequent Council meeting containing the outcomes of this investigation and a site recommendation.

A limited consultation occurred on the Conversations Merri-bek page as part of the community update that detailed the vision, objectives and proposed location for a new Coburg Library and Piazza. No significant feedback was received about the preferred library and piazza location.

3. Issues

Proposed Coburg Library and Piazza Location

The proposed location for the new library and piazza development has been determined by in-depth site analysis, supported by technical investigations, of the six sites that were the focus of the 'Revitalising Coburg: Objectives'. The proposed location, in the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site, was determined as the best-placed location to achieve the following desired outcomes:

- The library and piazza can be clustered with other local destinations to create an intensity of activity that draws more people to the area.

- The location can be easily accessed by people with limited mobility.
- The location can be easily accessed by multiple forms of transport, especially active and sustainable forms of transport.
- The location is easily visible from vantage points across central Coburg and isn't hidden away or facing the backs of shops or other closed in areas.
- The location is large enough to accommodate a new library adjacent to a piazza designed with optimal orientation and with consideration of overshadowing.
- The new library and piazza can bring change to parts of central Coburg that most need to be transformed, contribute to a general sense of uplift in the area and strengthening the sense of place.
- The impacts on the number of car parking spaces available is minimised, making use of locations that are the least used for car parking currently.

Council undertook several technical investigations on all six of the Council-owned sites in central Coburg, including the completion of land surveys and arborist, geotechnical and preliminary site investigations. Based on these feasibility studies, and in conjunction with the analysis of desirable attributes listed above, the proposed location of the Coburg Library and Piazza is the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site (see Figure 1). This location does not impede the Coles supermarket building which currently houses Schoolhouse Studios as a temporary use.

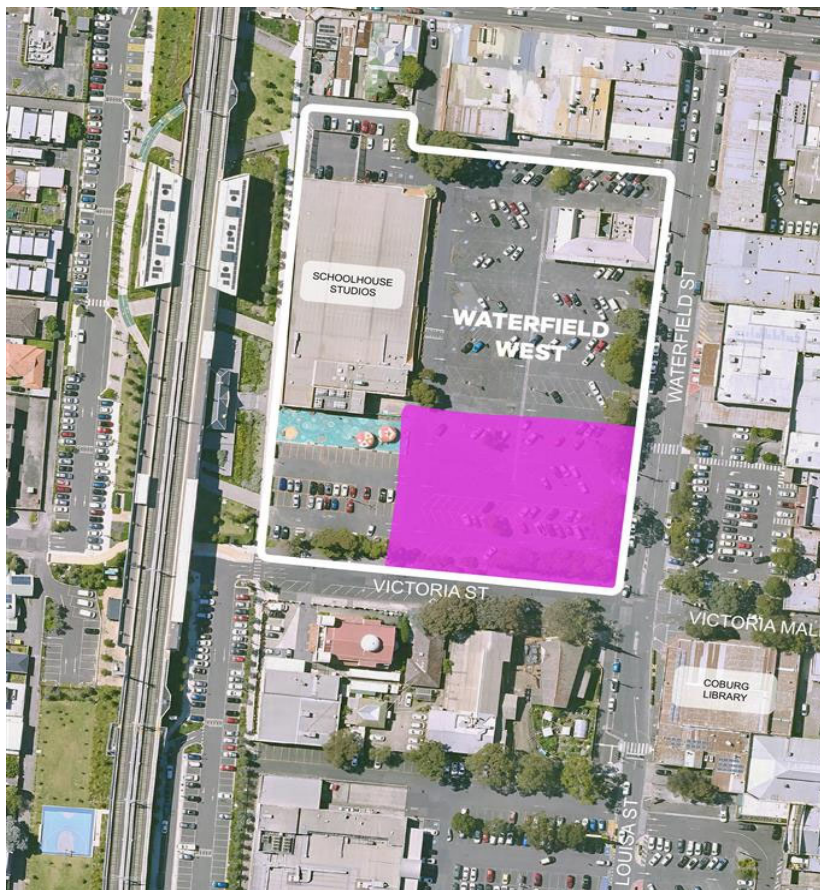


Figure 1: Proposed location of the new Coburg Library and Piazza, the south-eastern portion of Waterfield Street West site.

The south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site has significant strengths. The new Coburg Library and Piazza will be in the heart of Coburg, in close proximity to Sydney Road, Victoria Street Mall, the Coburg Market, the churches on Victoria street and the significant transport areas of the Upfield Shared User Path, Sydney Road trams and Coburg Station. This site is the most accessible for those with limited mobility and for those coming by bike or public transport, and occupancy studies show it is one of the least utilised locations for car parking in the area. The site's adjacency to Victoria Street Mall represents an opportunity to consider connected urban design, safety and activation benefits across central Coburg.

This site also has challenges, including managing stormwater, and the prevalence in the initial geotechnical testing of rock floaters and low risk of contamination, which will all need to be explored in detail at the next stage of planning for the project.

Car parking

The exact number of parking spaces which may be repurposed to deliver the library and piazza at the preferred location of the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site will depend on the final design of the community infrastructure. However, using Figure 1 as a guide it can be approximated that 128 spaces of the 369 spaces at the Waterfield Street West site may be required to be repurposed to deliver this project.

Occupancy studies and Council sensor data suggest that repurposing some existing car parking on the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site to establish a library and piazza will not have a significant impact on parking availability in central Coburg, including for business owners, shoppers, and visitors. Most people will still be able to park in the same area when driving at typically busy periods.

The provision of basement parking underneath the library and/or piazza could be explored as an option to offset some of these repurposed spaces. Early estimates show the following indicative costs to include basement parking as part of the project:

- 1 basement level, under library only (40 spaces) – \$6 million
- 1 basement level, under library & half piazza (63 spaces) – \$8 million
- 1 basement level, under library & piazza (88 spaces) – \$11 million
- 2 basement levels, under library & half piazza (125 spaces) – \$18 million
- 2 basement levels, under library & piazza (160 spaces) – \$24 million

In addition to the Coburg Library and Piazza project, a separate program that is establishing a draft central Coburg framework plan is considering a holistic approach to the provision of car parking in central Coburg. The draft central Coburg framework plan will be the subject of a comprehensive community consultation later in 2025.

Community impact

As noted above, the proposed location for the Coburg Library and Piazza within the south-eastern portion of the Waterfield Street West site will be easily accessed by multiple forms of transport and clustered with other local destinations to create an intensity of activity that draws more people to the area to meet and connect. This location also ensures that the development is well situated as a catalyst project for broader revitalisation in central Coburg.

Climate emergency and environmental sustainability implications

The Coburg Library and Piazza redevelopment will include best practice and innovative environmentally sustainable design initiatives to ensure these spaces at the south-eastern part of the Waterfield Street West site are more resilient to the impacts of climate change and more comfortable for occupants.

Additionally, as per a previous Council Resolution from 10 April 2024, it is intended that the new library include facilities that enable it to operate as a refuge during extreme heat periods.

Legal and risk considerations

The Coburg Library and Piazza redevelopment is a complex and significant project which will be subject to a high degree of public interest. The project is subject to probity advice to ensure the highest standards of integrity throughout.

Human Rights Consideration

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. A new Coburg Library and Piazza will provide safe spaces for people to gather and assemble, as well as access to public services. Given gender equality is an important consideration of this project, a Gender and Equity Impact Assessment has been completed.

The Coburg Conversation had a focus on the human rights priority groups outlined in Council's Human Rights Policy, namely:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Migrant, refugee and faith communities
- People with disabilities
- Women, girls and gender diverse people
- LGBTIQA+ communities

The engagement program targeted these priority groups and developed specific strategies and activities to ensure we heard from each of them throughout the process. High levels of participation across all of these groups were achieved as a result.

4. Community consultation and engagement

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Key sections in the Charter that are relevant to this report are the right to freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association, and the right to take part in public life.

Past Community Engagement

An extensive community engagement program known as the Coburg Conversation ran from September to December 2023. Over 1300 people took part, including a dedicated engagement with First Nations people. We heard broadly and deeply from the community, including people who may not typically engage with Council. There was strong demand for a new library and public space that better meets the needs and aspirations of the Coburg community.

A limited consultation took place in February 2025 which detailed the proposed vision, scope, cost and location for the new Coburg Library and Piazza and demonstrated how feedback from the Coburg Conversation had been used to guide the development of the project. A Q&A section was included in the Conversations Merri-bek page as part of the community update to provide the opportunity for feedback on the project. No significant feedback was received about the potential preferred library and piazza location.

Future Community Engagement

The next extensive community engagement is planned for January 2026 when the community's feedback will be sought on the draft concept design for the new Coburg Library and Piazza.

Future community engagement will continue to engage deeply with Council's human rights priority groups and key stakeholders to ensure their voices are heard and needs understood as the design of the new cultural infrastructure is developed.

As part of the continued planning for this project and the broader renewal of central Coburg, ongoing close engagement will be undertaken with local stakeholders and interested parties.

Communications

A full communications and community engagement plan has been developed for the Coburg Library and Piazza project.

5. Officer Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Council officers involved in the preparation of this report have no conflict of interest in this matter.

6. Financial and Resources Implications

The projected cost of the Coburg Library and Piazza is \$60 million. This includes a provision for contingencies and cost escalations.

Indicative financial modelling is being carried out for the upcoming Council 10-year Financial Plan which supports a funding strategy of up to \$60 million for the Coburg Library and Piazza project. The funding strategy comprises a mixture of reserves and borrowings. The funding strategy includes exploration of opportunities to derive revenue from the existing library site once it is no longer needed as a library building, either through sale or long-term commercial lease and utilising the proceeds as part of the funding strategy.

Council will continue to advocate to Federal and State Government, as well as any other appropriate funders, for grants and funds to realise the project.

The draft Council Budget 2025-2029 was considered at the Special Council Meeting on 16 April 2025 and is now out for public consultation, which ends on 22 May. Budget submissions will be heard on 27 May and final adoption scheduled for 23 June.

7. Implementation

There is an extensive project plan in place for the Coburg Library and Piazza development (including a specific plan for the design competition), alongside supporting stakeholder engagement and communications plans. The proposed timeline overview for the delivery of a new Coburg Library and Piazza is:

Date	Stage
May 2025	Council decision: Coburg Library and Piazza location
May – October 2025	Design Competition
December 2025	Council decision: Endorse draft library and piazza concept design for community engagement
January – February 2026	Community engagement: Draft concept design
September 2026	Council decision: Final concept design for community engagement
October – November 2026	Community engagement: Final concept design
July 2027	Planning permit
October 2027	Council decision: Construction contract
May 2028	Construction commences
November 2029	Coburg Library and Piazza open

Attachment/s

There are no attachments for this report.