The revitalisation of the City Centre is a critical success factor for Wollongong to maintain and grow its status as a thriving regional centre. This is highlighted in Wollongong 2022 and recognised in the Illawarra Regional Strategy 2006-2031.

A key program for achieving a revitalised Wollongong City Centre is the Façade Rejuvenation Program. The Façade Rejuvenation Program incentivises building owners and business operators to improve their building façades and shop fronts. This in turn, actively facilitates and stimulates an attractive, lively, and coherent streetscape which is aimed at attracting more life into the city.

The program will enhance the attractiveness of the endorsed program area to investors, business operators, local residents, tourists, visitors, and shoppers, thereby supporting and promoting business, commerce, industry, and providing economic benefit to the city.

Facade improvement has the capacity to enable rapid change for a city’s perception as it creates a more social environment and is a highly visible element of a city to passers-by. Building facades and shopfronts immediately affect the perceptions one has of a city. Improvements to facades and streetscape have the capacity to enable rapid change to the liveability factor and how inviting a city feels.

The Façade Rejuvenation Program is a significant component of the city’s revitalisation that will complement the Crown Street Mall refurbishment in addition to the $500 million of investment currently underway in the City Centre.

**Recommendation**

1. Council place the proposed Crown Street and Inner City Building Façade Rejuvenation Program on public exhibition for a period of 28 days for inclusion in Council’s Annual Plan 2013/14 as an additional financial assistance Program available for private gain.
2. Following completion of public exhibition a further report be submitted to Council outlining any submissions received.
3. Council endorse the program area outlined in Option 1 shown as Attachment 2.

**Attachments**

1. Inclusion to Financial Assistance Policy of Additional Specific Financial Assistance Program
2. Facade Rejuvenation Program Area Options
Report Authorisations

Report of: Tanya Buchanan, Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development
Authorised by: Brian Jenkins, Director Corporate and Community Services – Creative, Engaged and Innovative City (Acting)

Background

Wollongong’s City Centre is already an important hub for social and business interaction for our city’s community and visitors. The City Centre as defined by the Wollongong LEP 2009 has an economic output of approximately $5.8 billion per year, which is around 25% of total Economic Output for the Wollongong LGA. It plays a key role in accommodating a concentration of commercial, employment, residential, civic and cultural uses. Within the Wollongong LGA 71,968 people are employed - the City Centre employing the greatest amount of people with 11,628 jobs, this expands to 20,810 when taking into account the CBD fringe (including North Wollongong, Hospital and Coniston). The City Centre therefore represents almost 30% of all jobs in the Wollongong LGA. To maintain and enhance the status as a centre of activity for the region, greater activation and investment in the City Centre is required.

Council recognises that several City Centre building façades are in need of improvement. This is particularly important given building façades are substantial contributors to the perception and atmosphere of cities. Building façades are the face of the building that enhances the public realm. High quality facades and shopfronts encourage people to spend more time in attractive surroundings, and directly and indirectly improve perceptions of safety.

In 2012, Council commissioned the Crown Street and Globe Lane Rejuvenation Project 2012 Façade Audit – Guiding Principles Report (‘the Report’). The Report focused on a study area comprising Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the west and Corrimal Street to the east. It provides recommended action plans for each individual building within the study area and makes suggestions for new and amended Development Control Plan guidelines. Option 1 has been designed around this report and as part of the program we intend to provide the individual building findings to property owners.

The Facade Rejuvenation Program will contribute to the activation of the City Centre by contributing to it as an attractive place to live, work, play, and do business.
Proposal

It is proposed that Council endorse the Façade Rejuvenation Program in principle. Approval is sought to advertise the program as an amendment to the Annual Plan and, subject to further consideration following community feedback, include the Program in the Specific Financial Assistance Program under Council’s Financial Assistance Policy.

The key elements of the Program are outlined below:

- The program will offer a grant up to 50% of program costs to a maximum of $20,000.00 for private owners.
- Eligible works will include restoration of exterior finishes, repainting of building façade and windows, removal/relocation of air conditioning units, removal of opaque roller shutters/security grilles, repair or replacement of awning structures. Applicants will be required to demonstrate that any non-compliance issues are addressed or removed prior to receiving funds for upgrade and façade rejuvenation works.

Similar programs have been undertaken by several councils including Bankstown City, City of Canada Bay, City of Sydney and Rockdale City Councils.

Program Area Options

The Report focused on a study area comprising Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Corrimal Street to the east, and included Globe Lane. Notwithstanding, three program areas have been considered (attached).

Option 1 (Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the west and Corrimal Street to the east)

This Option incorporates 138 rateable properties (including strata title subdivided rateable properties in the category of ‘business’).

Option 1 encompasses the following benefits relative to Options 2 and 3:

- Each individual property in Option 1 was audited in the Crown Street and Globe Lane Rejuvenation Project 2012 Façade Audit – Guiding Principles Report;
- It will significantly improve the most well utilised pedestrian street in Wollongong and primary pedestrian link from the Wollongong Railway Station to the City Centre and foreshore beyond;
- Eastern Crown Street is an emerging café, restaurant and cosmopolitan precinct, that should continue to be supported with the anticipated substantial improvement at the western end of the City Centre;
- The inclusion of Globe Lane will incentivise facade and shopfront improvement in that growing and increasingly popular precinct;
• Option 1 will complement the Crown Street Mall refurbishment works. This addresses the need for a cohesive streetscape and consistency of quality between both the public and private domains; and

• Option 1 aligns closest with the recent roll out of Wi-Fi;

• Inclusion of western Crown Street will support the rejuvenation of a number of significant heritage buildings and shopfronts.

It is recommended Council support and endorses the area outlined in Option 1 for the Facade Rejuvenation Program. At the end of the first year it is recommended the results are reported to inform whether the scheme should be expanded to include Keira Street or other areas of the Wollongong LGA.

**Option 2** *(Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Corrimal Street to the east. Keira Street, bounded by Market Street to the north and Burelli Street to the south)*

This Option incorporates 158 rateable properties (including strata title subdivided rateable properties in the category of ‘business’). Option 2 has the potential to dilute the impact of the program with only limited funds available. Further, Keira Street was not included in the study extent of the Report.

**Option 3** *(Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Kembla Street to the east)*

This Option incorporates 109 rateable properties (including strata title subdivided rateable properties in the category of ‘business’). Option 3 does not include Eastern Crown Street and therefore, does not take into consideration supporting this emerging dining precinct even though the Report included the area. Inclusion of eastern Crown Street will help to mitigate potential negative impacts from the substantial improvement of the western end of the City Centre.

**Consultation and Communication**

Council staff consulted with Bankstown City, the City of Canada Bay, and the City of Sydney Councils who have all operated Facade Rejuvenation Programs. This included face-to-face meetings and a site visit to observe the success of their respective programs. Consultation and research has also been undertaken with building owners, business operators and real estate agents.

The proposed structure for delivery of the Program has been prepared in consultation with, and reviewed by, Council Divisions including:

- Finance
- Governance and Information – Legal
- Environmental Strategy and Planning – Heritage
- Development Assessment and Certification, and
- Property and Recreation
A formal meeting of internal stakeholders was conducted on 15 May 2013 to ensure stakeholder consultation with regard to the program.

### Planning and Policy Impact

This report relates to the commitments of Council as contained within the Strategic Management Plans:

**Wollongong 2022 Community Goal and Objective** – This report contributes to the Wollongong 2022 Objective 2.3 *The profile of Wollongong as the regional city of the Illawarra is expanded and improved* under Community Goal 2 ‘We have an innovative and sustainable economy’. This report also promotes Wollongong 2022 Objective 5.3 ‘The public domain is maintained to a high standard’ and Objective 5.4 ‘Community safety is improved’ under Community Goal 5 ‘We are a healthy community in a liveable city’.

### Legislative

The majority of works within this program are envisaged to be administered using the State Environmental Planning Policy (Exempt and Complying Development Codes) 2008. A concise guide has been prepared for applicants demonstrating what approvals, if any, are required for the different types of façade upgrades. The guide takes into consideration that a number of the buildings within the study area are heritage items.

For works that require approval in the form of development consent under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, a clear ‘how to guide’ and Statement of Environmental Effects pro-forma have been prepared to streamline the process ensuring the expedited nature of the program. Council’s Legal section has provided the necessary disclaimers for the concise guide.

### Economic Impacts

The program will enhance the attractiveness of the endorsed program area to investors, business operators, local residents, tourists, visitors, and shoppers, thereby supporting and promoting business, commerce, industry, and providing economic benefit to the city.

The program is also timely given the Crown Street Mall refurbishment program. The decluttering process as part of the program, combined with improved building facades and shopfronts both within and outside the Mall, will enable a rapid transformation of the City Centre.

Research suggests that high quality facades and shopfronts encourage people to spend more time in attractive surroundings, and directly and indirectly improve perceptions of safety. Studies from around the world have demonstrated that improved streetscapes have a strong correlation with low vacancy rates.

Subsequently, opportunities become available for businesses both during the day and the evening and, in turn, enable the further activation of the City Centre, breathing life and economic activity back into the heart of the city.
Social/Cultural Impacts

Facade improvement has the capacity to enable rapid change for a city’s perception as it creates a more social environment and is a highly visible element of a city to passers-by.

Building facades and shopfronts immediately affect the perceptions one has of a city. Improvements to facades and streetscape have the capacity to enable rapid change to the liveability factor and how inviting a city feels.

Spaces that appear liveable and inviting are proven to stimulate perceptions of safety. As more people feel comfortable entering the city, passive surveillance will increase and further improve safety in the city.

Safety/Regulation

Provisions for incentives to building owners to upgrade building facades within the City Centre precinct provides for a cleaner, more appealing streetscape that is proven to stimulate perceptions of a safe, liveable space. It is intended that this will attract more activity and life into the city both during the day and evening hours, increasing passive surveillance and allaying safety concerns for residents which has been identified as a significant deterrent by sections of the community as a reason they don’t visit the City Centre precinct.

As part of the incentive program, building owners who seek to benefit from the matched grant funding would be required to remove signage deemed to be unauthorised or non-compliant with the current Wollongong Development Control Plan 2009. This improvement alone will lead to significant positive change to the streetscape of the endorsed program area, particularly western Crown Street.

Similarly, roller shutters in the City Centre contribute to an unsightly environment. They disguise the product or service on offer, reduce ambient light on the street, potentially screen illegal activity, present a target for graffiti and contribute to a general perception that an area is unsafe with little to offer the local community or visitor. In light of this, the Facade Rejuvenation Program seeks to encourage building owners or business operators to remove opaque roller shutters, and if deemed necessary, replace them with solutions that meet the desired outcomes of the city.

Risk Assessment

The Wollongong Central Business District (CBD) Action Plan 2010 recognises business investment and attraction as a priority for the Wollongong CBD in order to build on its status as a regional city. The Façade Rejuvenation Program will assist in this regard through the facilitation of business/industry growth.

The risk of building owners not taking up the incentive program is something that will be addressed through education mechanisms such as stakeholder engagement, communication, marketing and use of managing agents who can engage closer and with property owners on the financial benefits of a façade renewal.
The offer is a one-off two year incentive for building owners to address concerns related to their building facades and non-compliant signage. It is envisaged that for buildings that fail to address concerns with non-compliant signage through take up of the program the matter may then be addressed as a regulation and enforcement issue. This process will ensure the outcomes of the program are achieved.

Financial Implications

Financial Assistance
The *Local Government Act 1993 (The Act)* provides that a Council may provide financial assistance to individuals or organisations for the purpose of exercising its functions. The Façade Rejuvenation Program will comply with all requirements as set within *The Act*.

Budget
Council, resolved to endorse a budget of $300,000.00 per year including delivery costs for the next two financial years for the Façade Rejuvenation Program:

- 2013/2014 financial year – $300,000.00
- 2014/2015 financial year – $300,000.00

Conclusion
Pending Council approval, it is proposed the Program be advertised as an amendment to the Annual Plan. Once public exhibition is complete, it is proposed the Program be included in the Specific Financial Assistance Programs under Council’s Financial Assistance Policy.

The endorsed program area within the City Centre of Wollongong is the primary focus of the Facade Rejuvenation Program. The success of this program will be monitored and an investigation will be undertaken on expanding this program into other streets and neighbourhoods after 12 months.
INCLUSION TO FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY OF ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CROWN STREET AND INNER CITY BUILDING FAÇADE REJUVENATION PROGRAM

A FAÇADE REJUVENATION GRANT

Aim: To incentivise building owners and business operators in the Façade Rejuvenation Grant Area to improve the appearance of their buildings façades and shopfronts through the provision of financial assistance. It is considered that façade improvements will:

1. Improve the visual appearance of the street and foster a unique identity;
2. Improve the perception of safety and atmosphere of the City Centre;
3. Support building owners and business operators to improve the public impression of their buildings and businesses, respectively;
4. Stimulate the creation of high quality façades and shopfronts to encourage more people to live, work, play, and do business in attractive surroundings; and
5. Address issues of illegal or non-compliant signage.

Eligible Applicants

Building owners and business operators of each rateable property in the category of ‘business’ undertaking works for building façades fronting the Grant Area shown at Figure 1 (pending Council resolution). Eligible applicants are required to submit all relevant documentation and information with the completed application form. Government-owned properties are excluded from applying for grant funding under this Policy.

Administered by:

Community Cultural and Economic Development

An assessment panel formed by the Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development will evaluate applications against formalised and ranked assessment criteria as outlined in this Policy.

1 Background and Eligibility

All applications must be for physical works on building façades fronting the Façade Rejuvenation Grant Area shown at Figure 1. Corner properties that have a building façade not directly fronting, but a façade adjacent to the endorsed project area are also eligible for grant funding. However to be eligible, these works are to complement façade works fronting the endorsed project area.
For works requiring planning approvals, including, but not limited to a development consent or complying development certificate, a condition will be attached to any agreement between Council and the applicant that stipulates planning approvals and their subsequent conditions must be obtained and adhered to prior to the commencement of any works.

Only those projects able to be completed in the time frames, as set within the assessment criteria of this Program, will be considered.

Examples of eligible projects include:

- Restoration of exterior finishes
- Repainting of building façade and windows
- Removal/relocation of air conditioning units
- Removal of opaque roller shutters/security grilles to be replaced with more appropriate transparent or inset behind shop display roller shutters.
- Skinning of existing awning structure and fascia with new material and signage
- Repair or replace awning structure.

**2 Projects not Funded**

Funding will generally **not** be provided for works not within the scope of the Program; including the following:

- Where the building has overdue rates payable to Council.
- Where the applicant has received financial assistance previously and not finished projects;
- Removal of non-compliant signage
- For the purchase of a building, site or movable item;
- Internal alterations and additions to a building;
- Relocation of a building;
- Where acquittal has not been received for a previous Wollongong City Council grant.
- Work that has already been completed;
- Purchase of tools and plant;
- Where property owners, or related entities, have previously received assistance under this Policy for three (3) rateable properties in the Façade Rejuvenation Grant Area shown at Figure 1.

**3 Assessment Criteria**

Eligible applicants will be prioritised according to the following assessment criteria:

- Is the project consistent with the relevant requirements of the Wollongong Development Control Plan 2009?
- Is there a cluster of eligible properties committing to undertaking improvement projects?
- Is the project likely to encourage upgrades of other façades?
- Does the project contribute to broader heritage conservation?
- Have licenced tradespersons/contractors details been submitted to undertake the works?
- The extent to which the project contributes to the visual improvement of the façade, and is highly visible from the public domain.
- The applicant's ability to demonstrate technical and financial responsibility with regard to the project.
- The applicant's ability to complete the project within the allocated time frame being twelve (12) months from the date of grant approval. In extraordinary circumstances, Council reserves the right to consider an increase to the allocated time frame of up to six (6) months.
- The degree to which the applicant is financially contributing to the project.
• Has the applicant read and agreed to comply with the terms and conditions applying to the Program.

Council reserves the right to approve or refuse a grant application in terms of the colour, material or method of execution as it considers appropriate. Prior to commencing the works applicants must enter into an agreement with Council detailing the agreed schedule of works and grant sum.

4 Level of Funding Available

$300,000.00 per year for the next two (2) financial years has been allocated to the Façade Rejuvenation Project:

2013-2014 financial year – $300,000.00
2014-2015 financial year – $300,000.00

The maximum level of funding per rateable property in the category of ‘business’ will be limited to 50% of the total project cost, to a maximum dollar value of $20,000.00 (excl GST) funding per (‘business’) rateable property. Council reserves the right to offer assistance of less than 50% of the project cost. Council will not offer assistance to the GST component of a project unless a registered ABN is provided. Applications that include a registered ABN will be eligible for grants up to $22,000.00. Council is then eligible to claim the GST component.

Where there are multiple property owners, or related entities, within the Façade Rejuvenation Grant Area shown at Figure 1, that multiple property owner, or related entity, will be eligible for funding up to a maximum of three (3) (‘business’) rateable properties within the Façade Rejuvenation Grant Area shown at Figure 1.

Business owners of eligible properties may apply for funding subject to obtaining owners consent. Funding will not be reimbursed until after completion of the project and Council has agreed that all work has been carried out satisfactorily and within the specified time frame.

The total amount of funding available is limited so Council may not be able to fund all eligible projects. There will be a maximum of up to two rounds per year. Funding availability in the second round will be dependent on funds not exhausted following the first round.

5 Procedure

• Applications must be lodged on the Sponsorship Application Form by the advertised closing date. Forms will be available on Councils website at www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au or may be requested by calling Council on (02) 4227 7111.

• All applications will be assessed by the Assessment Panel formed by the Manager Community Cultural and Economic Development Unit.

• Applications will be prioritised in accordance with the assessment criteria of this program.

• The Committee will recommend applications considered suitable for funding, with the General Manager having final approval.

• Successful applicants will be reported to Council in arrears for endorsement.

• Successful applicants will be advised of Council’s sponsorship and the sponsorship agreement.

• Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application.

• Any application received which requires consideration outside of the parameters of this program will be submitted to Council for determination.

• Successful applicants will be required to complete the project within the allocated time frame being twelve (12) months from the date of grant approval. In extraordinary circumstances only, Council reserves the right to consider an increase to the allocated time frame for up to an additional six (6) months. It should be noted that grants are only paid on completion of projects as a reimbursement of demonstrated expenditure.

6 Out of Round Applications

• Should there be sufficient funds remaining from the initial sponsorship allocation, out of round applications may be considered at Council’s discretion.
The Guiding Principles Report focused on a study area comprising **Crown Street** bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Corrimal Street to the east and including **Globe Lane**.

The area contained within the Guiding Principles Report is **Option 1**.
**Option 2**: Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Corrimal Street to the East. Keira Street, bounded by Market Street to the North and Burelli Street to the South.
**Option 3:** Globe Lane and Crown Street bounded by Railway Parade to the West and Kembla Street to the East