



COMMUNITY CONSULTATION REPORT

Ferry Hall & Community Facilities Community Feedback

INTRODUCTION

Ferry Hall is owned by the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) and is currently used as a classroom by Dodges Ferry Primary School. As part of the school redevelopment, DECYP has advised that Ferry Hall is no longer required for educational purposes and that its retention may limit the delivery of contemporary, fit-for-purpose facilities on the site.

Ferry Hall holds historical significance for some community members and is considered by some as a valued part of local heritage.

In response, members of the community have asked Council to explore opportunities to retain and repurpose Ferry Hall as a community space. Council committed to reviewing existing community facilities in the Southern Beaches area and seek feedback on current use, gaps, and future needs.

This consultation has been undertaken to gather community feedback and inform Council's consideration of future options and if an additional community facility is needed in the area.

ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Engagement included a range of activities to make sure we heard from both identified stakeholders and the wider community.

Engagement activities included:

Promotion through Council's usual communication channels, including:

- Council social media
- Council website
- *Sorell Times*
- Council E-News

Online community survey

Available from 3 March to 31 March to allow broader community input.

Community information and feedback sessions

Two sessions were held at Okines Community House on:

- 13 March
- 27 March

For attendees of the information session on 27 March, a site visit to Ferry Hall was also facilitated by Dodges Ferry Primary School.

Direct stakeholder and community engagement

This included direct contact with key stakeholders through email, phone, and in-person conversations. These discussions also included community members who had previously approached Council regarding the future of Ferry Hall.

Additional background work

Alongside the engagement activities, Council also reviewed existing community facilities across the Southern Beaches area to help better understand:

- how spaces are currently used
- where there may be gaps in provision
- potential future community facility needs within the area

PARTICIPATION

Survey participation

A total of 186 survey responses were received through the engagement process. Of these:

- 176 respondents identified as local residents
- 122 respondents indicated they live in, or represent, the Dodges Ferry area

Based on an estimated 3,500 households in the Southern Beaches area, survey participation represents approximately 5% of households. This provides context on the level of community engagement in the consultation process.

Community Information and Feedback Sessions

The two Community Information and Feedback sessions were attended by 21 community members, with a small number of people attending both sessions.

Social media and community reach

The engagement was also supported through Council's communication channels and generated online reach and community interaction.

Across the engagement period:

- the initial social media post (3 March) received:
 - 42 reactions
 - 6 comments
 - 36 shares
- reminder posts on 11 March and 26 March generated additional engagement and helped maintain awareness throughout the consultation period.

Between 3 March and 24 March, engagement content reached approximately **19,000 views** across Council's social media platforms, helping to raise awareness of the opportunity for community input.

WHAT WE HEARD – KEY THEMES AND FEEDBACK

Key Themes and Community Feedback

What we heard from the community

Across responses, several consistent messages emerged:

- Okines Community House is the most commonly used space; however, it can be difficult for smaller or more informal groups to access due to insurance requirements and hire conditions (e.g. birthday parties, social catch-ups, music groups).

- There is a noticeable gap following the loss of Forcett Hall, which has reduced the overall availability of suitable community spaces.
- The General Purpose Room and gym at Dodges Ferry Recreation Centre are perceived as difficult to book, with a general view that they are primarily used by the school and therefore less accessible to the broader community.
- The Carlton Surf Life Saving Club is often viewed as a higher-cost venue, which can limit its use for volunteer or low-budget community groups or private hirers.

1. Need for additional community space

A theme emerging from the consultation is the view that the Southern Beaches area would benefit from an additional community facility. This includes a space that is:

- suitable for smaller and mid-sized groups, and/or
- available for private hire and informal community use

Respondents described a shortage of flexible, accessible indoor spaces to meet growing local demand.

2. Pressure on existing facilities and lack of suitable alternatives

Community feedback suggested that existing venues may be:

- too small or too large for intended uses (i.e. Okines too small and the Gym at Dodges Ferry Rec Centre, too large)
- heavily booked or difficult to access
- restricted by hire conditions (including insurance requirements)
- cost-prohibitive for some groups

This has resulted in increased pressure on a small number of facilities and limited alternatives for community use.

3. Ferry Hall as a valued community and historical asset

A number of respondents referenced Ferry Hall as an important community asset. Key points included:

- its historical and social significance to the local area, including its nearly 100-year history and unique journey from Kellevie to Lewisham and then to Dodges Ferry
- prior to it becoming a classroom, it was a gathering place for communities (Kellevie, Lewisham, Dodges Ferry)
- a sentiment that it remains an important part of community identity and local heritage.

4. Suitability for community use and future potential

Some respondents expressed interest in the potential reuse or repurposing of Ferry Hall as a flexible community venue. Suggested uses included:

- community meetings and events
- youth and family activities
- cultural and creative programs (music, arts, exhibitions)
- workshops, classes, and informal gatherings
- markets and seasonal events
- private hire for celebrations

It was suggested that a flexible, multi-purpose space would help address current gaps in community facilities.

5. Condition of the building and cost considerations

Some respondents raised concerns regarding:

- the current condition and age of Ferry Hall
- potential maintenance and upgrade costs
- issues such as compliance requirements (e.g. asbestos, mould, lead concerns)

These comments reflected a view that investment decisions should carefully weigh:

- refurbishment versus redevelopment
- ongoing operational costs
- long-term sustainability and value for money

6. Groups or activities that currently struggle to find suitable space

Respondents in the online survey were asked whether there are specific groups that currently struggle to find suitable space locally. Approximately 52% of respondents selected either "Unsure" or "No".

For those respondents who selected "Yes" 48%, feedback more commonly identified potential user groups and suggested future uses for a flexible community space. Limited responses identified specific groups that are unable to access suitable space on an ongoing basis.

Feedback from the community sessions similarly focused on the potential opportunities and activities a flexible community space could support, rather than identifying specific groups currently without access to suitable facilities.

Examples referenced through the engagement included:

- community and volunteer organisations
- arts, music, and cultural activities
- youth and family-based activities
- informal social and recreational groups

This suggests general interest in additional, flexible community space options within the Southern Beaches area, with varying views on specific current gaps.

RECOMMENDATIONS – COMMUNITY UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

Council will continue to work through a staged process to better understand community facility needs in the Southern Beaches area, including consideration of Ferry Hall and other existing community spaces.

The feedback received through our engagement activities highlighted community interest in Ferry Hall, particularly its historical significance and potential future community value. In response to this feedback, Council will continue exploring what may be possible and practical in relation to the building and broader community facility needs within the area.

At this stage, Council has agreed to progress the following next steps:

1. gaining a better understanding of the current condition of Ferry Hall
2. continuing to consider broader community facility needs identified through the Southern Beaches Plan
3. further exploring existing community spaces and opportunities within the area, including Forcett Hall

It is important to note that Ferry Hall is not currently a Council-owned asset. There is also currently no allocated long-term budget or identified Council-owned site for relocation of the building or development of a new community facility in the Southern Beaches.

Any future consideration of Ferry Hall, or a Council-managed community facility, would also need to take into account operational requirements such as hire fees, insurance, and facility management conditions, which may influence how accessible and affordable the space is for community use.

As such, any future decisions will need to be carefully considered within the context of broader community priorities, available resources, feasibility, and long-term planning across the municipality.

Council will also work to a timeframe aligned with the Dodges Ferry Primary School redevelopment project, as advised by DECYP.

Council acknowledges the community interest in Ferry Hall and will continue to provide updates as this work progresses.