

## **10.8. Feasibility Report - North Sydney Repair Cafe**

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**ATTACHMENTS:** Nil

### **PURPOSE:**

This report provides background on the establishment of repair cafes and investigates the feasibility of establishing one in the North Sydney local government area.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This report addresses a Notice of Motion at the 8 August 2022 resolution of Council regarding a full-time repair café in North Sydney. The Council resolved:

*1. THAT Council as soon as practicable prepare a report on the feasibility of opening and running a full-time repair café, where people gather to work on repairing objects of everyday life including electrical and mechanical items, clothing and accessories.*

The report summarises the approaches that Council could take in deciding whether there was a community appetite for a repair café in the North Sydney area.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

If deemed feasible, any monies needed for the establishment and ongoing running of a North Sydney Repair will be funded through external grant funding and Councils Environment Levy.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**1. THAT** Council undertakes a needs analysis via community survey regarding the establishment of a repair café in North Sydney.

**2. THAT** should the needs analysis come back with positive interest for the establishment of a North Sydney repair café, Council staff seek expressions of interest from community members to become volunteers and facilitate the organisation of a volunteer community group.

## **LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1. Our Living Environment
- 1.2 Environmentally sustainable community

## **BACKGROUND**

Repair cafes are places where people come together with the shared aim of repairing broken, damaged or old and unwanted items in order to give them a new lease on life. There are over 2200 repair cafes worldwide, with five in NSW and two in the Sydney region - the Sydney North Repair Café in Lane Cove and The Bower Repair Café in Marrickville.

Repair cafes are usually run by volunteers who are skilled in one or more areas of repair and are most often held once or twice per month in a community space. Areas of repair are determined by the skills of the recruited volunteers, however popular fields of repair include electrical, bicycles, jewellery, sewing and furniture.

Visitors, mostly members of the local community, bring their items along and together with the expert volunteer, make the repairs. Participants are invited to watch, learn and talk to the repairer as they fix the item, helping to pass on the skills that seem to have been lost in our society.

Most often, repairs are done for free as the volunteer is donating their time, however donations are always welcome to cover any extra costs and insurances incurred by the running of the group. Traditional repair cafes include a café where visitors can enjoy a cup of tea, chat with neighbours or simply enjoy watching the repair process.

## **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Protocol.

## **DETAIL**

### **Repair Cafes in Sydney**

Operating out of the Lane Cove Living and Learning Centre, the Sydney North repair café operates from 2-4pm on the first and second Sundays of the month. Beginning life as a true repair café, members of the community are invited to bring their broken and worn items for repair or simply enjoy a cuppa and a chat with other members of the community.

Focussing on gadgetry, jewellery, ceramics and sewing, the café now repairs between 25-60 items per month. The fields of repair on offer are dictated by the skillset of the volunteer repairers and the café generally operates on a Week 1/Week 2 schedule as follows:

<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>
Gadgets	Gadgets
Sewing	Sewing
Jewellery	Jewellery
Ceramics	Shoes and leather
Glass	Tool and knife sharpening
Shoes and leather	
Tool and knife sharpening	

Following the COVID 19 pandemic, the repair café has changed the way it operates, and it is now run via an online booking system with 15 min sessions available. This has resulted in less items being brought in for repair as the number is capped as well as less opportunity for interaction among members of the community.

The Bower Repair Café operates out of The Bower Reuse and Repair Centre, Marrickville. The Bower is an award-winning environmental charity and a champion of reuse and repair committed to reducing landfill, with the principles of waste avoidance (reuse, repair, refurbishing and recycling) underpinning every one of the Bowers initiatives.

In fact, reuse and repair is the guiding principle for everything they do at the Bower and in addition to the repair café, the Bower collects unwanted household goods from 21 Sydney metropolitan councils, including North Sydney. This means nearly 2.7 million residents in Sydney have access to this free rehoming service and thousands of unwanted household goods are saved from landfill every year.

The Bower runs the repair café and their fixing workshops and courses at their centre in Marrickville and in addition, Councils can pay them to run a repair café in their LGA. Fields of repair include electrical, clothing, bikes, and furniture refurbishment depending on the skills of the volunteers.

### **Key considerations with the establishment of a repair cafe**

Speaking with members from the Sydney based repair cafes, several issues were highlighted for consideration in the establishment of a North Sydney Repair Café. These included:

1. Management structure:

This relates to how a repair café is set up and operated. Most repair cafes are established by a skilled set of volunteers who develop a delivery model that is reflective of their skills, available time and other venue considerations. The volunteers form a not-for-profit community group and operate under that model.

2. Recruitment of volunteers:

Possibly the most important aspect of establishing a repair café is the recruitment of skilled volunteers. Usually, these skilled volunteers will come together to form the repair café in the first instance however if this is not the case, promotion and advertising for recruitment needs to be undertaken. The Bower does have some paid staff who run their repair cafes/courses, but these are subsidised by the fees that participants or host councils pay for their service.

3. The age demographic of the skilled volunteers:

It was found that most volunteers consisted of retired community members and those from the 60+ age group. This has some inherent problems including the often limited time availability of that age demographic due to other social and family commitments. More recently the COVID 19 pandemic impacted the volunteer's availability and therefore the offered services of the repair café, as many did not wish to continue with volunteering given they were considered 'at risk' members of the community

4. Insurance/ operating costs:

Depending on the delivery model of the repair café the volunteer group usually needs to source and pay for its own insurance and find a source of income for ongoing operational costs. This could be done in several ways including Council contributions, grant funding or accepting donations from the community for repairs.

5. Hours of operation:

As most repair cafes are run by volunteers, hours of operation need to fit in with the lives and schedules of those willing to give up their time. This could potentially change if funds were found to pay for the time of the repairer.

6. Storage of equipment:

Storage of tools and equipment needed for repair is a necessary component of running a repair café. Space needed for storage is reflective of the services on offer at the café and can range from a small cupboard through to large workshop.

7. Issue of potential profiteering:

This was identified as an issue with offering a free repair service in Lane Cove. It was found that some members of the community would pick up items for free from curb side collections and bring them to the café for repair with a view to on sell. Whilst not the norm it was something that needed to be discouraged.

### **Proposal for a North Sydney Repair Cafe**

To date, the North Sydney community have not expressed the need for a repair café in the local government area. Reasons for this are unclear however it could be due to the fact that we promote the Lane Cove repair cafe to our residents and we also support The Bower in picking up unwanted goods from the LGA. However, should the proposal for a North Sydney

Repair café be warranted, Council would need to facilitate its establishment and the recruitment of a team of volunteers, as well as identify a suitable venue.

With regards to a location, the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability would make a wonderful site for this volunteer initiative. The centre shares the principles of reuse and repair and has existing partnerships with other community run organisations such as The Sydney Library of Things. The Sydney Library of Things operates every Saturday 9am-12pm from the old Coal Loader workshop. The Coal Loader has several rooms that could be used for the repair café depending on operating hours, and there is potential space on site for the storage of equipment needed for repairs. There is also an on-site café open Wednesdays –Sundays where the community can purchase coffee and cake whilst the repair café is operating. The site is fully accessible and has ample free parking.

An alternative, but not preferred, option could be one of the newly acquired Quarantine Station cottages which has been set aside for community use. The use of this site however will be subject to an expressions of interest process which a potential repair café would need to participate in. There are issues with this site including lack of parking for volunteers and community members and the site not being fully accessible which may preclude it as an option. Enquiries have also been made with the Sydney Harbour Trust as to community opportunities at Sub-Base Platypus, however we are yet to hear back from them.

It is anticipated that the establishment and facilitation of the proposed repair café would be undertaken by Environmental Services staff, and it is envisaged the following process would be followed:

1. Council undertakes a needs analysis via community survey to ascertain if there is a need for a repair café in the local government area. This would be an online survey and promoted via Councils social channels, e-news, North Sydney News and other publications.
2. Based on the results of the community survey, Council seeks expressions of interest from skilled volunteers in the local community who would be interested in being repairers and/ or joining a volunteer management team.
3. Council facilitates the establishment of the volunteer group and ascertains any ongoing needs of the group.
4. The delivery model and structure of the repair café would be determined by the volunteer group however Council could assist with some seed funding if necessary.
5. Council would be involved in ongoing promotion and support of the repair café.

Should the needs analysis and expressions of interest be deemed insufficient for the successful establishment of a North Sydney repair café, alternative avenues for delivery would need to be considered. Such alternatives could include:

1. Payment for groups such as The Bower to hold offsite repair cafes/courses in the North Sydney local government area on a regular basis. These could be delivered through Councils Green Events program or the Coal Loader program of events;

2. Payment of skilled repairers to staff a North Sydney repair café on an agreed schedule on an annual basis. This would be a costly exercise and grant or other funding would need to be secured.