8. existing centre characteristics
8   Existing centre characteristics

Community voices

The Kingston Centre is one of the best group centres in Canberra because it has a ‘bustling’ feeling a lot of the time. The shops are varied and interesting with lots of good dining opportunities. There are usually lots of people around and many people like busy lively streets and places.

The centre has a strong community spirit and is relaxed and relaxing with a village atmosphere. It is centrally located and a good meeting place.

Its major strengths are its history and heritage, sense of community, cafe culture and Green Square. Its major weaknesses are the rundown buildings, lack of convenience retailing and the adverse impacts of entertainment activities.

It is almost perfect.

8.1   History and heritage

Kingston Centre was initially established as a small centre to meet needs of South Canberra residents who were a considerable distance from Civic in the 1920s and 1930s. However, it became the premier shopping centre within the early federal capital with an influence that extended beyond the immediate suburbs.

It was recognised as a successful shopping and social precinct. This role continued until the development of the Monaro Mall in Civic in the 1960s, after which the centre declined until redevelopment of the surrounding area started in the 1970s.

The Kingston Post Office and much of the Kingston Centre have been nominated to the ACT Interim Places Heritage Register (Figure 28). It is one of the only centres to have been nominated.

The draft citation for the Heritage Register states that:

The significance of the Kingston Shopping Centre is to be retained by protecting the integrity of the original planning layout, especially the relationship of the L-shaped buildings to the public space, Green Square and the remnant fabric of the 1920's buildings flanking the Giles Street / Kennedy Street corner.

The Post Office has been nominated for its design and architectural detail as an example of inter-war architecture.
Figure 28: Heritage
8.2 Urban structure and block size

The core of the centre, Section 21, is bounded by Giles Street, Jardine Street, Eyre Street and Kennedy Street. It is a large, roughly rectangular section with blocks laid out in an ‘L’ configuration serviced by an internal lane (Highgate Lane). Open space (Green Square) occupies the eastern corner of the section, completing the rectangular shape. The peripheral blocks border the core on each side and are predominantly rectangular in shape (Figure 29).
The size of blocks in the centre varies (Figure 30). The main feature of the subdivision pattern is that blocks in the original part of the centre were subdivided as residential blocks rather than commercial blocks. They are deep (about 45 metres) and wide (22 - 24 metres) compared with typical commercial blocks elsewhere in the centre. These blocks could be subdivided to create two frontages to Kenney Street or Giles Street and Highgate Lane.

In comparison blocks fronting Green Square are typical commercial blocks (about 27 metres deep and of variable width although several blocks are about 12 metres wide).

The blocks in the original part of the centre were developed with narrower shop fronts of about 6 metres and with one exception have not been subdivided. This pattern has survived. It is the tenancy/shop front pattern rather than the blocks that establish the fine grain of the built form. Consolidation and redevelopment of these frontages would substantially alter the character of the streets.
8.3 Property ownership

An examination of the land titles information indicates there are a large number of lessees, with few having multiple holdings. In the core, four groups hold two or more adjacent sites ranging in area from about 1700m² to 2200m² (Figure 31).

Property, especially in Section 21 is tightly held and few properties have been transferred over the last 17 years. The pattern of holding property over the long term has contributed to the retention of the original character and limited redevelopment in the centre.

8.4 Function and floorspace

8.4.1 Floorspace

The centre is relatively large, with approximately 34,000m² of floorspace (excluding visitor accommodation) (Table 5). It is the fourth largest group centre after Dickson, Manuka and Weston Creek.

Section 21 is the core of the centre and contains over 60% of total space. Retailing, cafes and drink establishments are concentrated in Section 21 whereas personal services and non-retail commercial uses are more widely distributed across the centre (Figure 32).
Table 5: Floorspace and number of businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Floorspace</th>
<th>Establishments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>m²</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>14,021</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>5,043</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafés/drink establishments</td>
<td>5,091</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>6,039</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>3,041</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>33,585</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment (jobs) 1820  
Visitor accommodation (units/rooms) 165


Figure 32: Distribution of floorspace
As a consequence of the land use, active frontages dominate the retail core but there are few active frontages elsewhere in the centre (Figure 33). In general the uses that occupy these frontages open onto and/or relate directly to the street.

*Figure 33: Active frontages*
In some parts of the centre such as Green Square and Kennedy Street, cafes/drink establishments are the dominant ground floor activity, highlighting the importance of this role to the centre (Figure 34). A significant amount of retail space (mainly associated with household goods) is not located at ground level, which is unusual in a group centre.

Figure 34: Indicative ground floor uses

8.4.2 Kingston as a retail centre

Based on floorspace, retailing is the major function of the centre but is less significant based on the number of businesses. The retail functions differ from those of other centres (Table 5). The key differences are:
- the major retail function (by floorspace) is household goods. These occupy a much higher proportion of retail space compared with the ACT as a whole, and
- food (convenience) retailing is a relatively minor function and as noted previously the proportion of supermarket space is relatively small.
8.4.3 Kingston as a small-scale office centre

Based on floor space, the commercial function is the second most significant function of the centre with the largest number of separate businesses (Table 5). Activities include community and professional organisations and general commercial uses.

### Table 6: Retail functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retail activity</th>
<th>Kingston m²</th>
<th>Kingston %</th>
<th>ACT %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket/food</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing/shoes</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>8,562</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department/variety</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,021</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4.4 Kingston as a cafe/entertainment precinct

Kingston Centre is a major destination for eating out and entertainment activities. This function is of district and metropolitan significance. Based on IBECON retail data, about 5% of ACT cafe/drink establishment floorspace is located in Kingston compared with about 2% of total retail space.

The cafe/entertainment function continues the tradition of the centre as a meeting place and extends the time that the centre is active each day.

Although the cafe/entertainment functions are usually perceived as night time activities, they are also an important day time activities for the centre. This adds another dimension to the centre, attracting different people from the retail function and, in turn, benefiting other businesses.

This function, and particularly the outdoor eating areas, adds to the character and feel of the centre and is the primary reason that the public realm is so active.

8.4.5 Kingston as a service centre

The service functions include personal, business and property and financial services. The service function meets different needs; personal services cater to the catchment area whereas business services cater to a wider area.

8.4.6 Kingston as a visitor accommodation precinct

The suburb of Kingston functions as a major location of visitor accommodation in the city and the accommodation within the centre is an extension of that role. Visitor accommodation supports and is supported by the cafe/entertainment function.
8.5  Built form

Buildings contribute to the public domain and ideally should define and enclose those spaces. Their size, configuration and scale in relation to the surrounding area influence how they add to the vitality and activity of streets. In this context the success of buildings is determined by whether they contribute positively to the public realm.

The built form varies across the centre and especially between the core and the peripheral areas.

8.5.1  Core

Several common characteristics define the built form within the core and contribute to the distinctiveness of the centre.
Buildings are typically low rise, small scale and fine grained and of one to two (2) storeys (Figure 35). Buildings are built to side and front boundaries, creating a continuous street frontage and clearly defining the public realm.

The continuous awning around Section 21 links development from different periods and is possibly the major element unifying the built form. The awnings differentiate the pedestrian experience along one side of each street from that along the opposite side and from the driving experience. Widespread removal of the awnings would substantially alter the character of the centre and would be undesirable from the perspective of weather protection.
Along Giles Street and Kennedy Street the built form is dominated by the consistent building design of the façade above the awnings. It consists of clerestory windows and a parapet at a standardised height. In comparison, the building envelope rather than the building design establishes the continuity and consistency of scale apparent along Jardine Street and Green Square.

Throughout the retail core and the northern side of Jardine Street shop entries are frequent, open directly onto the street with few blank walls or gaps between buildings and are transparent (Figure 36). They contribute positively to the public realm, provide interest for and an invitation to pedestrians, and assist with community safety. The shop fronts support the function of the centre as a meeting place and add to a lively public realm and community safety.
8.5.2 Periphery
Along Kennedy Street, Giles Street and Eyre Street the built form of the periphery differs from the retail core and is characterised by:
• larger scale buildings than in the core (up to four (4) storeys), many of which are the result of redevelopment of the original buildings
• free standing buildings often set back from the street and along Kennedy Street screened by courtyard walls, and
• entrances set back from the street with less overlooking or active frontages than in the core.
• Photos of periphery buildings

8.6 The public realm
A well-designed public realm attracts visitors and increases expenditure thus assisting retailers, especially smaller, independent businesses. It improves amenity and safety and contributes to social and economic vitality. Figure 37 shows the existing public realm in the Kingston centre.

Figure 37: Public realm
Figure 38: Cross section of typical street

Figure 39: Cross section of Jardine Street
8.6.1 Streetscape

The design and appearance of the streets is a significant part of the overall character of the centre. With the exception of Jardine Street, the streetscapes are relatively uniform with different verge treatments on each edge (Figure 38).

- The edges are generally well defined, particularly in the core.
- The footpaths adjacent to the core are wide and separated from the street by raised wide brick planter boxes, reinforcing the sense of pedestrian enclosure. People feel comfortable in these spaces. The footpaths on the periphery edge are narrow.
- One the core edges the footpaths accommodate outdoor dining without compromising pedestrian movement or landscaping.
- Within the core the footpaths are continuous, allowing pedestrians to move freely and avoiding pedestrian/vehicle conflict. There are numerous vehicle crossovers on the periphery edge, especially along Kennedy Street.
- Mature and semi-mature street tree plantings line the verges adjacent to Section 21. Planting is less mature or frequently missing on the periphery edge.

The Jardine Street streetscape is the most interesting and successful in the centre for the following reasons:

- consistent pavement treatment in terms of design and materials
- similar scale and form of buildings on each edge, and
- mature street trees on both sides define and enclose the public space.

Jardine Street (Figure 39) represents a model of how the streetscape of other streets could be improved to create more appealing and successful spaces that better integrated the core and periphery of the centre. The high level of interaction between the public realm of the streets on the core edge, built form and land use creates a strong sense of place and is one of the major assets of the centre. Cafes spill-out onto the street producing an active public realm where people want to be. It is well recognised that people attract people. The presence of people passing through or sitting in the public realm increases its attractiveness and in turn attracts others to the centre.

In contrast interaction between the streets and perimeter buildings is more passive.
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8.6.2 Green Square

Green Square is the only open space and is the main focal point in the centre. It is frequently used to define the character of the centre and is a popular and well known landmark in Canberra.

The orientation provides good solar access and the mature trees provide shade. Cafes/drinking establishments spill out onto the Square, adding to its vitality and interest. It is located on the route between the main parking area and the main shopping locations and has a constant procession of people. Green Square is a composition of mature deciduous trees set within raised masonry walls and grassed areas that are separated by wide brick paved walkways and sitting areas.

The space is versatile and inclusive; the surrounding activities appeal to different population groups at different times of the day/night and the design of the space enables children to play.

Community voices

The community universally values Green Square and regards it as a key meeting place, not only in Kingston but also in Canberra.

Green Square is a gem and not utilised to its full potential.

The Green Square space is a core element of the Kingston fabric. Facing the sun, it is the warmest and most active strip in winter.

Green Square is vital to the centre’s success. A bit European and like the squares of Spain. You can eat and meet friends in a child friendly environment.

Green Square needs to be green and the grass restored.
8.6.3 Other elements

The quality and condition of surfaces and furniture have a significant impact on the perceived quality of the public realm.

**Surface materials**

Brick is used consistently as the surface material around the core edge. Surface materials on the periphery edge are different and include concrete footpaths and gravel verges.

**Street furniture**

In theory, street furniture should be consistent, appropriately located to reflect pedestrian movement and co-ordinated to minimise clutter.

A variety of street furniture is used throughout the centre. Public seating is located around the centre including in Green Square and at one of the two bus stops. Only a few seats are near trees for shade. Seating is in variable condition.

**Lighting**

Lighting is a fundamental component of the public realm and can contribute to its identity. Lighting levels should meet relevant standards, avoid light pollution and allow night-time safety.

Lighting treatments in the centre are the same as those throughout the suburb. Street lighting is intended to light the roads rather than the footpaths. With the exception of Green Square, traffic poles rather than pedestrian scale lighting is used. In Green Square the lighting is an integral part of the overall design of the space.

Lighting levels in Kingston vary and the community perceives that some areas are not well lit (Figure 40).
8.7 Connectivity

Movement routes are the major organising element of urban structure and also the most durable.

Ease of access to and within a centre and the availability of parking contribute to the success or otherwise of centres. Good public transport and bicycle access are also important. In general, centres with high levels of access and internal connectivity are successful.
8.7.1 Access to the centre

The centre is located on suburban collector roads that link the two arterials serving the centre (Figure 41). It is serviced by two bus routes. In addition bus routes along Wentworth Avenue, including the REDEX route, service the centre. Bus stops are located in Giles Street and Eyre Street.

Cycle ways are located along Wentworth Avenue and Canberra Avenue and through Telopea Park but there is no designated cycle way leading directly to the centre.
8.7.2 Movement within the centre

Within the centre, Eyre Street and Giles Street function as main streets and Jardine Street and Kennedy Street function as connecting streets. Highgate Lane is a service road providing rear access to all but two blocks in the core. The public land at the L-bend is used as a parking area and waste storage and collection area.

On-street parking is located on the peripheral edges of Giles Street, Kennedy Street and on the core edge of Jardine Street. The associated vehicle movements and pedestrian activity enforce a slow speed environment. Pedestrians tend to cross these roads mid-block rather than at designated crossings, resulting in some pedestrian and vehicle conflicts. On-street parking is limited in Eyre Street and traffic speeds are generally higher.

Pedestrian movement is primarily around the perimeter of the centre. Highgate Lane and two arcades provide an alternate movement option between parts of the centre during business hours, but the arcades are closed at other times (Figure 42).
8.8 Parking

Parking in the centre is a mix of on and off-street public parking and private parking (surface and basement). Blocks in Sections 21 and 22 have little or no on-site parking but elsewhere on-site parking is generally available.

There are 1433 parking spaces within the centre or walking distance, including nearly 360 on-street public parking spaces and 1070 off-street spaces. The on-street parking within the centre is a combination of parallel and angled parking. The off-street spaces are evenly divided between public and private spaces. Bicycle racks are at two locations (Figure 43).

Compared with other centres, Kingston has a relatively large amount of on-street parking around the perimeter adjacent to the shops. This is one of its strengths.

Public parking is distributed across the centre and in the surrounding area (Table 7). Public parking represents about 60% of total spaces (about 900 spaces).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public parking</th>
<th>Supply</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beyond centre (&lt;400m)</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity Giles Street</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity Kennedy Street</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity Eyre Street</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicinity Jardine Street</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total public spaces</strong></td>
<td><strong>892</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TAMS Parking Survey (May 2009)

The ACT Parking and Vehicular Access General Code requires that about 1870 car spaces should be provided in the centre, assuming that dual and complementary use of spaces is not taken into account. This includes over 500 spaces for café/entertainment activities.

A parking study conducted by TAMS (May 2009) concluded that existing parking was not fully utilised. The survey found that the utilisation of parking spaces in an around the centre varied. At the time of the survey, parking utilisation rates were:
- public off-street public parking - 36%
- private off-street parking - 32%, and
- on-street parking - 65%.

As would be expected use varied depending on proximity to the centre. On-street parking on Eyre Street, Giles Street and Tench Street was effectively fully utilised and parking that was more remote from the centre was less utilised.

It should be noted that the surveys were conducted outside peak demand periods and are likely to understate demand. However, observation of the public off-street parking indicates that it is generally not fully utilised.

The apparent oversupply is likely to be the result of a combination of the following:
- multi-use of spaces by different uses at different times of the day
- multi-purpose trips to the centre
- individual businesses generating less parking demand than implied by the parking code
- the under-performance of the centre, resulting in fewer visitors
- the tendency of users to walk to the centre (67% of participants at the first community information display (Tuesday) and 87% of those at the second display (Saturday) had walked to the centre), and
- timing of parking surveys outside peak demand periods.

The planning controls allow existing surplus parking provision to be taken into account when determining future requirements. Given proposals to expand the centre and the apparent over-supply it would be appropriate to quantify the under/overprovision in greater detail than has been done to date and taking peak demand into account.