

# Beer garden beats plants with prickles in turfing heroin

Josephine Tovey

THE pedestrian mall in Kings Cross that was once described as "the epicentre of drug activity in Australia" has become an alfresco drinking zone, as the City of Sydney council tries to drive away heroin dealers.

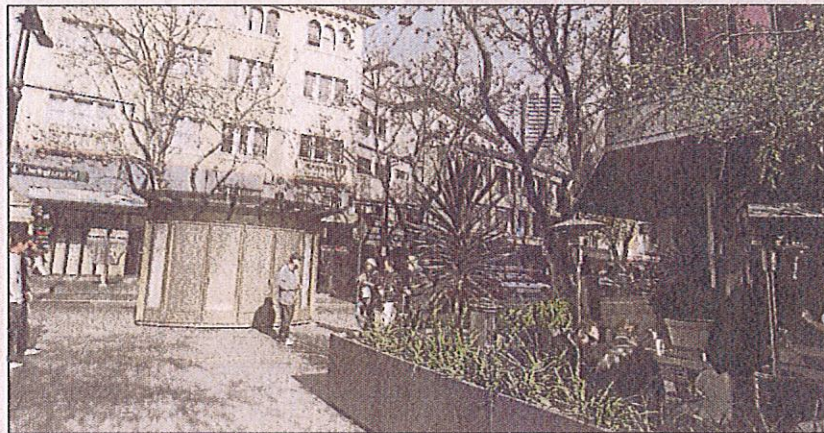
Last year the Sugarmill Hotel was granted a trial outdoor licence to put a beer garden in Springfield Mall, an alcohol-free zone. That licence was extended by 12 months at a council meeting this week, with the support of the Lord Mayor, Clover Moore.

But many residents are unhappy that one drug has effectively been swapped for another in a suburb where many feel alcohol has surpassed heroin as the greater blight.

"The saturation of pubs is what we're fighting here," said a resident, Carole Ferrier. "Residents feel absolutely duded."

The council voted 2-7 on Monday to continue the trial, but restricted trading outside to a 9pm curfew. Submissions opposing the beer garden outweighed those in favour 22-7. At a council meeting in 2005, Cr Moore said unamplified concerts and prickly plants had already been tried as a deterrent to drug activity in the mall, a spot described in a police royal commission as "the epicentre of drug activity in Australia".

Cr Moore said alfresco dining near the soon-to-be-developed Westpac building was another option: "If we have people sitting in a restaurant or a coffee



**Peace and quiet ... the alfresco zone at the Sugarmill is making drug dealers go elsewhere.**

Photo: Ben Rushton

shop, the drug dealers might feel as though it is all a bit public."

But the building did not become a restaurant or a cafe. It became a three-storey pub and club.

John Duncan, a group director of Keystone Hospitality, which owns the Sugarmill, told the *Herald* the council had worked with him on developing the venue. "The council

encouraged us to activate the street front in our design of the building. Council has always wanted to decrease the anti-social issues the neighbours faced on a daily basis."

Local police say it has worked and "illegal activity" in the area has subsided. They also say the venue is well run and complies with the council's guidelines. But another resident, Kate Hamilton, said the expansion had created more noise and forced drug activity onto back streets.

"On countless nights there were drug dealers and drug users on my porch when I came home in the evening," she said. She now sleeps with earplugs.

The Greens councillor Chris Harris voted against the outdoor licence.

"There are other ways council could have activated this space," he said.

And he said he was disappointed with the decision to cap operating hours at 9pm.

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## Correction

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Yesterday's story "Beer garden beats plants with prickles in turfing heroin" should have attributed to John Duncan, a group director of Keystone Hospitality, disappointment with the decision to cap operating hours of the Sugarmill Hotel at 9pm. The Greens councillor Chris Harris opposed the hotel's outdoor licence.