

# Reports to the 2004 AGM



## Parks and Open Spaces

Over the past year, there has been some uneasiness as Glebe is 'absorbed' into the City of Sydney. On the whole, the transition from Leichhardt to the City has been positive. In broad terms, the community's interaction with the Council has been excellent at the Councillor level (both before and after the election of a new Council), but somewhat uneasy at the bureaucrat level. But they're new – they'll learn!

There is certainly a definite Council commitment to the maintenance and upgrading of parks in Glebe. This is most visible in Bicentennial Park, where a major works program is under way. This involves the repair of boundary walls, the upgrading of disabled and other access, the resurfacing of paths (including environmentally sensitive 'bridges' over the exposed roots of the venerable fig trees), new vandal-proof lighting and an investigation into the poor performance of the trees planted in haste in 1988. This is all very positive – the only negative aspect being the Council officers' initial view that *consultation* meant telling the community what you had decided to do after you had decided to do it. Some of the more objectionable aspects of the original draft plan, such as creating mounds 'for interest' in an otherwise Victorian park, have since been nipped in the bud, but it was a close run thing.

By contrast, the planning process for Foley Park has been impeccable. The Glebe Society and other relevant stakeholders were engaged (and properly engaged) from the beginning of the planning process, and the end result will be a plan of management based on significant public input, culminating in a community forum on 22 June. When the plan of management goes on exhibition, there may well be aspects that not everyone likes – but we certainly can't say we were not consulted and listened to.

In the context of Foley Park, I would like to congratulate Bobbie Burke, Liz Simpson-Booker, David and Fay Mander Jones, Ian and Cynthia Jones and Bob Armstrong. Then dedication to the cause has been impressive.

Liz and Fay (and their friends) have continued to be active in their role as 'foster parents' of Kirsova Playground and Paddy Gray Reserve respectively. Next year, it would be good to see the expansion of the 'adopt a park' initiative.

In addition to major parks such as Bicentennial Park and Foley Park, Glebe is blessed with a number of smaller parks and gardens, ranging in size down to pocket parks marking the sites of departed terraces. All these parks are well used (over-used in many cases) and well loved, and most are in need of TLC. Even a Council with the resources of the City has to prioritise its maintenance program, but we are assured that there is such a program, and we need to liaise with the Council over the coming year to make sure that its priorities bear some resemblance to ours.

We have not been successful on all fronts. Some months ago we wrote to the Council asking why a healthy magnolia had been removed from the front of Bendledi, and seeking its replacement with a mature specimen of the same or a similar species. Apart from an admission that the tree appeared to have been removed in error, we are still waiting for a reply from the Council. The officers who deal with trees in parks seem to be less attuned to good public relations than those who deal with street trees. There is work to be done.

Looking back on the year, I think we gave too little attention to the 'open spaces' part of the portfolio. One notable open space that needs attention is Glebe Gateway at the intersection of Glebe Point Road and Parramatta Road. The splendid space outside University Hall, which contains a number of significant monuments, is marred by an ugly and virtually unused plastic tent outside

the Rumours restaurant.

If the Council was prepared to forego the rent, and if the restaurant was prepared to remove this ugly structure in a public place, everyone would be much better off.

One thing I can say is that, in terms of parks and open space, Glebe is infinitely better than it was when we first came to live here 30 years ago. The challenge for next year will be to maintain the focus and accelerate the pace of change.

**- Ted McKeown**

## Planning

How has being included in the City of Sydney's boundaries affected our concerns about development in and near Glebe?

I am tempted to borrow Chou En Lai's dry witticism when asked about the impact of the French Revolution: 'it's too soon to say', but this would not be quite true.

The Society set out to cultivate good relations with the City, and although this has been across two boundary changes, and two completely different sets of Councillors, relations are probably better with the City than they had been with Leichhardt Council since 1983.

There are good reasons for this. City Councillors are keenly aware of the need to cultivate resident support. They are less inclined to indulge in unproductive political wrangling amongst themselves than was the case in Leichhardt. The City has a clear majority of resident-focused Councillors, and also thinks proactively and strategically, which was generally not true of Leichhardt.

One consequence is the high opinion now formed in Councillors' minds about the passionate attachment of Glebe residents to their suburb. This emerged in the recent struggle to prevent the demolition of a pretty weatherboard cottage in Charles Street, Forest Lodge. The Society does not have many members in Forest Lodge (although the ones it

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does have are very dedicated), and when the residents first contacted me some had not even heard of us. However, the fight they put up would have been a credit to any Society subcommittee. They researched the site, collected letters and petitions, lobbied furiously and turned up in strength to no less than three intimidating Council meetings, and at last their efforts were rewarded. All I did was give them advice, attend the meetings and speak briefly in their support, but their gratitude was deeply felt. The Councillors, meanwhile, were most forcibly struck, and exclaimed on the residents' strength of feeling and commitment.

The Society has also shown its willingness to work positively and cooperatively with Council. City Councillors see great benefit to themselves in supporting the campaigns of Glebe residents, and especially the well-organised and well-attended public meetings of The Society. The presence of a City office in Glebe, and the character of the Place Manager, Marcello Massi (now moved to Queensland) has also helped relations.

However, against this it is fair to put the City's unfamiliarity with residential areas, leading sometimes to a failure to consult adequately, and the very large increase in the area controlled by the City, leading to inevitable delays and confusion.

The City also has a major problem Leichhardt does not have. All Councillors sit on the Planning Committee, as at Leichhardt. However there is another committee, the Central Sydney Planning Committee, on which just three Councillors sit. The other four positions are occupied by State Government mandarins, presumably so Macquarie Street can keep control of the CBD. Under normal circumstances matters affecting Glebe do not come before Central Planning. However, in July I realized to my horror that **all changes** to planning instruments must be approved by Central Planning.

Hence DCP 49, which controls the Abbey site, could not be repealed without Central Planning consent. The inadequacy of DCP 49 was a theme at both of the public meetings called by The Society to discuss proposals for the Abbey, because it permits overdevelopment and does not sufficiently protect nearby residents. It is unlikely we will get an adequate solution while the DCP is in place. The City has asked the State Government to abolish Central Planning, so far without success. Certainly from Glebe's point of view we would be better off without it.

There is no doubt the City will have to hire more staff, and must also try to prevent rapid turnover of planning staff, which was the cause of much dissatisfaction with Leichhardt. Nothing alienates people so quickly as finding applications being dealt with by different people each week. When we met recently with the City's Strategic and Heritage Planners it was clear that although improving Glebe's Heritage Controls was a top priority, progress would be very slow without greater resources. This is of particular concern because, as the Heritage Review by Godden Mackay shows, Leichhardt's controls are inappropriate for Conservation Areas like Glebe, where most applications are for modification to existing buildings, rather than new dwellings.

In my last annual report I warned members that development on the Bays would soon become the biggest threat to Glebe. To prepare us better I organized a ferry cruise in February so members could survey the various sites, many of them difficult of access from the land. The colour leaflet prepared by Bruce Davis gives members a clear guide to all potential development. Make sure you get one if you missed out.

My warning is now being borne out. The Society, in conjunction with other interested groups, is following a strategy of trying to prevent or alter problem proposals before they are exhibited. We are also seeking to have draft planning instruments and the Masterplan changed to protect current users of the Bays and

prohibit problem developments, and to improve the process of notification, consultation and assessment.

We must be prepared for a prolonged struggle, because the forces pushing for very large boating facilities in the Bays are wealthy and powerful. Two Development Applications are already being prepared: one for a boat repair workshop under Anzac Bridge, and one for dry storage of 850 vessels on the northern side of Rozelle Bay. The Society should give maximum support to the Bays and Foreshores Subcommittee, because they will bear the brunt of the main threats to Glebe for months, and possibly years.

- Neil Macindoe

## Environment

With the increased cost of energy, the continued restrictions on water use, and the need to encourage awareness of environmental sustainability at the household level, the Subcommittee organised an inspection of Michael Mobbs' house in Chippendale in January 2004. His house collects water that rains on the site, processes all sewerage and generates its own electricity. It provided an insight into what could be achieved in all houses in Glebe. In March 2004 the Society again participated in Clean Up Australia day. An enthusiastic team of Members braved the inclement weather and at low tide cleaned an extensive area of the foreshore extending from Cook Street to the Bicentennial Park.

The Subcommittee has been collaborating with the City of Sydney in initial steps to write a Master Plan for the street trees in Glebe. It supported the residents of Darghan Street in their attempts to save a street tree, and provided advice to residents of Bellevue Street on the possible establishment of guidelines for the painting of murals in our suburb. We were also members of a focus group established by the City of Sydney to develop an effective and informative waste education guide for the residents of Glebe.

- Andrew Wood



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·Glebe's Treasures, that 50 page compilation of listed and worthy buildings and places, heritage of course, has lain in the corner all year! But now we are testing our ability to explore our streets and evaluate any additional buildings that could and should be proposed for heritage listing.

·We have proposed to City Council the strengthening of their conservation/heritage controls, putting forward as worthy of study, those now being considered by Leichhardt. We now note with delight the report of movement along these lines in the *SMH* of 17 August.

·*Lyndhurst* is being vacated and there is a concern for its public accessibility and continued care and maintenance from the new owners or tenants, whoever they might be. We have aired these concerns with The Historic Houses Trust, the present owners, and plan to arrange a visit to this hidden treasure when it is vacated.

·The Walter Burley Griffin incinerator is also looking for a tenant, well the City Council is, and ideally a use that has synergies with the foreshore walkway and perhaps the use to be made of *Bellevue* further north along this same walkway. A workshop on these issues has been proposed to Council.

·Some of us may have noticed that a small length of the majestic sandstone retaining wall that contains Parramatta Road as it runs past Sydney University was repaired just in time for the last Olympics, and then no more work was done. The committee is pushing hard to have it completed. The wrought iron palisade fence is rusting out and in the process splitting the large capping stones. Our background research suggests that the road was moved from its original path up and over where Arundel Street is to its present position some time between 1836 and 1844, but does not tell us if this was also the time of building the wall.

·Chris Johnson, the Government Architect, enlightened and entertained members earlier in the year and

Max Solling is to do likewise in October.

There is much to explore and many projects to pursue, and we, Robyn, Lydia, Ian, Mack, Yvonne, Fay, David, Anna, Phil, Liz and Jeanette warmly welcome new members.

- David Mander Jones

## Bays and Foreshores

The Foreshore Walk – Is going ahead and during the year Sydney City Council, to their credit, has been conducting successful meetings with representatives from the local areas. I must compliment the Council on its open minded and accommodating approach. We believe the outcomes from agreements that have been made to date should be most pleasing.

Bank Street Powerboat Ramp - We welcome the Minister for Transport's decision to scrap the proposed development under the eastern end of the Anzac Bridge in Blackwattle Bay (Herald, 6 August, page 5).

Bellevue, the Historic House in Blackwattle Bay Park - Is the next major project that needs local input as to its usage. Please make your opinions known to Robert Armstrong - he is our man handling this project.

Sydney Slipways - A \$19 million boat repair and maintenance facility proposal to be located under the western end of the Anzac Bridge now has far more public awareness thanks to a few dedicated members (we really do need more people to assist us in these crusades). Their actions have brought about a very well attended (over 150 people) and executed public meeting, resulting in a motion being passed unani- mously that has been forwarded to Craig Knowles, Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources.

Rozelle Bay Marine Centre - A \$95 million 850 dry boat storage facility is another development appearing on the landscape and is to be located where the existing large grey Hobbs shed stands, west of the Waterways Building.

These developments will make all types of navigation in the narrow Bays much more hazardous, especially for our non-motorised crafts. A bottleneck of traffic will develop at the narrow passage under the old Glebe Island Bridge. Pollution from these motorised craft and facilities will cause the water quality to deteriorate seriously, as the Bays receive very little natural flushing, due to their location and shape. The aesthetic impact will also detract from what the Bay Foreshore Walk is specifically trying to achieve.

One must note that the Sydney Harbour Draft Regional Environmental Plan still permits boat ramps and commercial marinas to be developed in Rozelle and Blackwattle Bays. This means that we need all the help we can muster to fight these proposals, whose only priority is to generate profits for a few, at the expense of **our community**.

- Mark Dent

## Website

Since the last AGM, it has been a busy, but challenging, time for Bruce Davis and myself, during the Davis' stint in Paris. But we have risen to the occasion and shown ourselves to be true 'technophiles' with our use of microphones and webcams for instant communication via the internet! TGSi guests visiting our house often join in the Parisian dialogue from *chez Jones* and it has become a useful exercise in demonstrating how to operate a website on the other side of the world.

This became apparent recently when a change in ISP required the transfer of all our files between Paris and Sydney. We discovered that we are not exactly minor operators but are managing just under 600 files as the Society's site develops! It was a most rewarding and interesting revelation to learn how our website has grown in a few short years.

- Cynthia Jones-Webmaster

(with lots of help from the Society's Paris Bureau)

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