

JOHNSTONS CREEK PARKLANDS WORKSHOP ST SCHOLS, 8 DECEMBER 2012

The Glebe Society responded to the previous consultation at St Scholastica's College on 27 June. These notes are the result of the Stage 2 consultation on 8 December and are organised according to the six strategies adopted for the Workshop.

Transport, Access and Circulation

The Workshop leaders correctly noted that the general form of the Parklands is a large area of waterfront, extending to a waterfront walk, and with broad corridors extending into the interior, in some cases far beyond the study area.

This is important because these facts determine a large part of the current use, and also the potential use. For this reason determining the priorities helps to maximize public benefit.

Not surprisingly, some of the Council staff were not fully aware of the current patterns of access and use. Some are constant, though they vary in intensity, and some vary according to weather conditions.

1. Recreational walking and jogging, dog walking and cycling occur at all times of day, including early morning and evening. Naturally they are mainly confined to paths, especially the waterfront and line of the creeks. Fishing and use of watercraft are also constant. These are all associated with very low levels of parking.
2. Formal sports are concentrated in the afternoons and at weekends. The amount of parking depends on the sports competition. The City should make it a requirement for all clubs using facilities to adopt a green travel policy of walking/cycling, public transport and car sharing.
3. The large open spaces near the waterfront, as opposed to the paths, are suitable for passive recreation, and attract large numbers of picnickers in clement weather, especially workmates, friends and extended family groups and children's parties. These take place during weekends and afternoons and during holiday periods. The City should encourage as many groups as possible to use Light Rail and public transport generally through its promotions. The size of these spaces means many people can be accommodated without any sense of crowding, and this is a rare and important feature that should be retained.
4. These large spaces also attract a wide variety of informal sports that do not require facilities, and are generally compatible with picnicking. These include all types of children's games, touch football, Frisbee and exercises related to tai chi, martial arts and performance. Dogs should be restrained in these areas to prevent conflict.

At certain times the parklands may appear to Council staff to be underutilised, but this is a result of the wide variety of uses that is possible. In particular, certain times of day and of the week vary in intensity for particular types of activities.

When considering access to the parklands it is important to emphasize how attractive access by public transport, cycle and foot is. The Light Rail route in particular is spectacular, with two viaducts with extensive views plus a tunnel. It deserves more promotion as a tourist route in itself. The extension to Dulwich Hill is also partly elevated. The further extension through the CBD and to UNSW and Randwick announced on 13 December will integrate Light Rail fully into the public transport network and make it the major access route once completed.

All the foot and cycle routes, except the commercial section of Ross Street, are beautiful, often through heritage areas with mature trees and gardens. Some of these streets form attractive borders to the parklands themselves, such as Northcote Street, Eglinton Road and Cliff Terrace. The

elevated approaches from the Toxteth Estate and Forest Lodge have spectacular views across the valley and the Bays. These approaches and surroundings add considerably to the appeal of the parkland, and every effort should be made to ensure people are aware of them and use these approaches rather than cars.

Likewise the appeal of the water should not be underrated. Its placid, extensive, picturesque, protected and sunny character, with activities ranging from the mild to the strenuous, plus the views of maritime industry and boats and up the Harbour, make the waterfront exceptionally seductive: hence the popularity of the Walk. The City should seriously consider a water connection for the waterfront between Annandale and Garden Island. The progress of the long-planned connected walkway is slow, but with the parks in Pyrmont, and the soon to be completed Barangaroo, there is certainly enough interest to create a significant recreational ferry route, perhaps along the lines of the current services to Watsons Bay and Cockatoo Island.

Opportunities for parking will always be limited. The Society supports the relocation of parking adjacent to the Crescent. However, at this point it is appropriate to reiterate the primacy of pedestrian and cycle connections to Annandale and Forest Lodge. These are the areas shortest of open space, and also most affected by the redevelopment of Harold Park. Hence any obstruction to the likely points of access should be avoided, and these points of access made as easy, safe and enticing as possible. Normally they should be at grade, or with a moderate slope. Mounding and planting along the Crescent border would help to reduce traffic noise. The safety of vehicles entering and leaving the carpark is also an issue. For both pedestrians and vehicles a signalised intersection at Minogue Crescent is essential.

From the discussion at the Workshop it seems likely the Hill will be retained. Even if this is the case, securing good access to the Jubilee Park Stop, and also along the canal, is likely to require reshaping and cutting back, as well as extensive landscaping and replanting. In the process it should be possible to reopen at least some of the viaduct arches at the canal end of the Hill.

As an attractive free venue the Parklands deserve to be promoted in the Department of Housing areas that have good access by foot, cycle and public transport, which include those in Glebe, Millers Point and Ultimo.

Heritage

A speaker at the Workshop correctly identified the Viaduct as the outstanding Heritage Item in the Parklands, and we have suggested above the promotion of the Light Rail as a tourist experience. Opening the arches appears to have universal support. There is also the possibility, where the arches do not have such good views, of adapting the method used in *Lethe Viaduc Vert* in Paris, of allowing a modest artistic/artisan activity contained within completely see-through glass walls. This is consistent with, and complementary to, the studios proposed for the Tramsheds, and the traditions of the area. As already mentioned, further arches may be freed when the Hill is reshaped, although some would remain for the use of clubs.

Indigenous use of the area for hunting, fishing and gathering would have ceased before reclamation and removal of the mangroves. There is, or was, evidence of disturbed middens at the confluence of Orphan School and Johnstons Creek. The Society suggests consultation with local aborigines and an archaeologist for any further evidence and the preferred method of interpretation. There is a memorial to indigenous children on the former Children's Hospital site nearby. There is abundant photographic evidence of the filling of the swamp and creation of the canal, and some of this material could be used in interpretation.

Other elements of the Parklands have heritage significance and deserve preservation and/or

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interpretation. These include both the early avenue plantings and the Mackenzie extension of them into the Bicentennial Park, the cricket pavilion, oval fencing and various memorials. The rocky outcrop denoting the original shoreline is significant and should be marked. The Canal itself, and the Allen Truss Bridge, deserve at least some commemorative interpretation, even if the creek is naturalised and other crossings created. The Society would support at least one new crossing near the mouth, to continue the Waterfront Walk.

The other major Heritage Item abuts the park although it is actually part of the Harold Park site. The former Tramsheds play a key role for the Parklands, however, because it will contain 500 sq m of community space, and will almost certainly include a range of amenities, including cafes. It is also proposed to provide some onsite parking. The Society supports the reinstatement of the award-winning garden adjacent to the Tramsheds, which should include, as it did originally, the Digger's Memorial that was relocated to Leichhardt Bus Depot. The Society has already recommended elsewhere the interpretation of both the Tramsheds and associated Water Tank, and the Paceway.

Water

Water is indeed the key to the success of the Parklands, as the Walkway bears witness. However, whilst views of and across, and access to, water is such a benefit, large areas, especially the sporting fields on either side of the canal, are subject to flooding. There appears to be universal support for naturalisation of Johnstons Creek, including from the MRA, but this has to be managed in the context of inundation, as well as probable rises in sea level.

The Creek is to some extent itself artificial, since the original watercourse emptied into a swamp, and early maps show a more meandering path of varying width (and therefore, depth). There is certainly a case for managing the stormwater more effectively by retaining and cleansing it in extended wetlands, the first of which appears to be effective and flourishing. However, additional wetland areas will impinge on access and reduce land available for other purposes. It is certainly possible to construct paths and platforms on and around the wetlands that increase the variety and interest of the parkland habitats while maintaining a high degree of access.

It may also be possible to reengineer the canal to reduce the risk of flooding. Naturalisation, correctly implemented, reduces the velocity of stormwater, and also creates new habitats for fauna and flora. It may be necessary to look again at the balance between tidal flows and stormwater. The establishment of saltmarsh reeds and grasses that has been done on flood prone areas near the mouth appears to be successful as well as attractive. The Glebe Society would support the extension of the mangrove wetland, but it has taken some time to become established, and it may be necessary to revise the strategy.

Environment

There is near-universal support for increasing the wetlands, which ties in very closely with the water management issues mentioned above. The Society is concerned that this extension should not reduce the connectedness of the parklands, but through appropriate paths could extend and vary this connectedness. The same applies to extending the mangroves. The naturalisation of the creeks would also mean more varied plantings and habitats.

There is strong support for increasing habitat for small fauna, especially beneath the cliff and along the canal. This would also occur where the wetlands were extended. The Society notes that the new habitat planting needs to be dense enough to provide protection for small species, though it need not be very wide. There also has to be a sufficient distance from trees to give fauna the opportunity to escape into their habitat from predators. Both here and in the wetlands dogs should be restrained.

A more formal garden to commemorate the pre-existing award winning garden adjacent to the

Tramsheds could also include appropriate habitat. The establishment of a community garden on a suitable site, such as on top of the Hill, would create greater diversity of use and recreation and also encourage pollinators and insectivores.

The more formal areas of the parklands work well for defining major access routes and paths, and the associated avenue plantings provide protection for relaxing and picnicking. This theme should be extended to new access routes from Annandale and Forest Lodge, and to the routes extending inland. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* shows these routes extending across Parramatta Road and through the University of Sydney. The Johnstons Creek and Orphan School Creek corridors are important elements in these routes, which also provide wildlife habitats and corridors. The connections to Whites Creek, though outside the municipality, are also important and should be considered. Pedestrian connections from the parklands through Glebe to Sydney University need to be signposted, and in many cases planted, or foot and cycle ways extended.

The Hill and Maxwell Road will require special attention. The views from Maxwell and Victoria Roads are varied and outstanding, but are currently partly obscured by weedy and exotic species. These should be removed, and replaced by trees with crowns high enough not to obscure views, and low plantings. Most of the vegetation on the Hill is also introduced, and needs to be replaced as the slopes are reshaped and stabilised. The views from the Hill should also be considered when establishing new uses, such as community gardens.

Currently the Bicentennial Park Stage 1 is in poor condition. The soil originally laid down was not of sufficient quality. The City should consider methods of improvement, such as top dressing. Treatments of this kind have been successful along the waterfront avenue.

Recreation and Community Facilities

There is universal support for the flood-proofing of the existing sporting fields and the creation of an additional field. It is expected that flood-proofing would increase use by thirty percent, and with the additional field, the figure will be closer to fifty. The Society acknowledges that such works are likely to be costly, but with such a large benefit affecting so many people, especially children, it should be considered a high priority. The Society notes artificial surfaces are not possible for flood prone fields.

The Society supports the provision of storage for small non-motorised watercraft near the Annandale pontoon. This is also a suitable site for foot-driven paddle craft, paddle boards and kayaks to be hired commercially, and there may be similar opportunities in Blackwattle Bay. Care must be taken not to interfere with the traditional users: rowers, kayakers and dragon boats.

There is a strong preference for locating new facilities within existing buildings, especially the Tramsheds. As only 500 sq m of these will be under City control there will need to be continuing negotiation with Mirvac. The Glebe Society does not favour construction of cafes or kiosks outside existing buildings.

In this matter it is important to consider the context of the Parklands. As far as existing refreshments are concerned the cottage so well restored by the City, *Bellevue*, located on the Waterfront Walk, has been successful. Cafes and picnic supplies are a short distance along Glebe Point Road. The Light Rail gives access to a vast range at the Fishmarket, John Street, Star City, Pyrmont Bridge and Haymarket stops, and the first mentioned -are largely on the waterfront. In the near future- there will be waterfront cafes at the Catamaran site at the head of Rozelle Bay and the Superyacht Marina on the northern shore, both approved. The Society would expect the renovated Tramsheds to include both cafes and suppliers. Most of these operations are within the City's area, and are not only worthy of promotion in the context of the Parklands, but could also be involved in activities and

contribute to the cost of such activities and promotions.

The Society would expect toilets, showers and change rooms to be included in the Tramsheds. It may be possible to improve the existing amenities near Jubilee Oval and Federal Park, rather than create new structures.

At least one new children's playground needs to be provided near the Tramsheds, and if there is room, electric barbeques and a picnic area could be nearby, as is already the case in Annandale. In general, larger spaces and plantings should be designed with opportunities for picnicking in mind, as this is the most popular recreational activity.

There are significant educational opportunities in relation to habitat planting, wetlands, and mangroves, associated saltmarsh and naturalisation of the Canal, and also the community garden. Depending on the extent of these, there may be a case for more extensive description and interpretation than signage. The Society expects Mirvac will ~~be accoubale for effective~~ handle interpretation of the Harold Park and Tramsheds sites, but the City will probably be in charge of the restoration of the tram to be kept on site. The curtilage of the Tramsheds should be extensive enough to indicate the tramroads, and the route taken by trams to the sheds should be clearly marked and the fencing preserved.

Character and Visual Amenity

Under Heritage the Society has already mentioned recreation of the Tramsheds Garden, including the Diggers' Memorial, which needs to be returned from Leichhardt Bus Depot. Bruce McKenzie always intended to include public art in the centre of the Bicentennial Park, the area surrounded by flagpoles. At one stage the City was quite keen to relocate sculpture displaced from the CBD to this point. At another stage the sculptor responsible for the Wondabyne Sculpture Park (2006) wanted to use art around the figs in the Annandale section. For a brief period last year there was an aquatic mobile installed in the Bay near the mouth of the Canal, now relocated further along the waterfront walk. It may be possible to secure an aquatic sculpture from Nigel Helyer, who is responsible for the sound sculpture in Foley Park. An example of his work is near the Boy Charlton Pool.

There is already a major piece of public art, Earth versus Sky, that illuminates the Moreton Bay figs in Pope Paul VI Reserve, powered by a shapely turbine near the Canal. The Society suggests the priorities should be restoration of the garden, a central Bicentennial sculpture and an aquatic mobile.

Extension of the wetlands and naturalisation of the Canal, as well as the creation of habitat along the cliff base and the Canal will also increase diversity and broaden the character, as would the new plantings and a community garden on the Hill. The Hill will also gain a different character as the principal viewing area across the valley as well as the foreshore, though as previously mentioned, Maxwell Road views should not be neglected. The Watertower, though part of Harold Park, is also a Heritage Item, and ~~juxtaposed together~~ ~~creates in many ways~~ with the sawtooth roof of the Tramsheds ~~prodques this~~ produces this the most strikingly varied outlook.

In general the design of the current parklands harmonizes with the relative formality of the surrounding built environment. To some extent the shape of the new parkland areas will continue to reflect this, as the corridors driving inland are relatively long and narrow, as are the new streets in Harold Park, though there may be opportunities to introduce more curves, and also, in the case of Light Rail access via the Hill, a sense of seclusion. The shape of the wetlands, together with the

long curve of the viaduct and of the arches, ensures variety. The Society has previously asked for improved seating with backs along the waterfront, and there will be a need for considerably more seating, especially near playgrounds and sportsgrounds, as well as near views and picturesque spots.

As well as the new flora associated with the cliff and canal, the City could consider a greater variety of flowering shrubs and trees for the more informal areas, such as have been used on the Waterfront Walk.