



CALLAN PARK MASTER PLAN

Submission of Heritage Group of Leichhardt District Incorporated (H-GOLD)

1. Summary:

The key points made in this submission on master planning proposed for the Callan Park site are:

- a. retention of public ownership of the whole site;
- b. adaptive reuse of structures underpins heritage conservation strategies of the site's built environment.
- c. a focus on the site's retention as open space usable for public access recreation and a range of multiple uses as is compatible with its overall heritage significance;
- d. landscape conservation on pharmaceutical and edible vegetation indigenous to the Cumberland Plain;
- e. foreshore conservation programs incorporate regeneration of mangrove and natural oyster beds; and
- f. conservation and refurbishment of as many of the 20th century buildings as is economically and technically feasible.

2. Public Ownership:

Situated as it is in the midst of an inner urban residential community having a strong historical overlay of industrial activity, this unique large-scale site, which is still relatively abundant in open space, is of value to the quality of life of surrounding communities - present and future. As demographic pressures for development of new high-density (and potentially high-rise) residential dwellings on Sydney's inner urban neighbourhoods increase, it is essential that control of the Callan Park site stays vested in a public authority so as to primarily ensure:

- a. political and public accountability on policies and issues affecting site management and use;
- b. opportunity for broad community involvement in policy development and management issues; and

- c. enhancement of the existing ethos of community trusteeship, as well as continuing community involvement in key decisions affecting the site's use and management

3. Multiple Uses:

a. Building Occupancy:

As generalization, Australian, North American, and European (and in increasing instances, Asian) heritage conservation experience shows that occupancy of serviceable heritage buildings for socially worthwhile purposes is essential, not only for the items' long-term conservation prospects, but also for enriching public appreciation of the items' significance. The current mixed use of the built environment of Callan Park for higher education, artistic, and health-related functions appears to be working extraordinarily well and this policy should be both entrenched and extended.

Compounding neglect of many former hospital buildings has led to their rapid dereliction. The focus of the site's future use should continue to focus on multiple eleemosynary and other activities of wide community benefit. These activities could be complemented by low-key ancillary commercial ventures (*e.g.* plant nurseries, cafés, childcare and early childhood education, and art galleries) where these promote and enrich the major uses to which the site is put.

b. Open Space:

Open space remains a contentious issue in contemporary local politics. Historically, when the population of the Balmain peninsula was denser, the situation was worse. The surveyors who oversaw the peninsula's successive subdivisions realized that, given how tiny building lots were, provision of recreation grounds would be essential.

At that time reclamations of mangrove swamps at Rozelle Bay, White Bay and Iron Cove, though ecologically devastating, would provide open space. Indeed, in 1899, the White Bay Power House site, together with reclamations north of White's Creek, was reserved for open space. Until the erstwhile Balmain Municipality resumed King George Park in 1912 as part of the Iron Cove reclamation, Easton Park, established in 1890, which also adjoined the Rozelle Bay swamps, served as Rozelle's sole recreational ground.

The British soap manufacturer, William Lever, was renowned for progressive labour welfare, and the Sunlight Soccer Club was possibly formed at his White Bay factory two months after his 1914 visit to Balmain. When however Lever Brothers later sought to develop land for the use of their workers' sports and welfare association, they had to look to Drummoyne.

O'Connor Reserve, an irregularly shaped park located on the south-eastern side of Victoria Road is named in honour of the late Richard O'Connor,

who was a lifetime resident of Rozelle and the last mayor of the former Balmain municipal council, which was abolished in 1946. The Evans Street Tram Siding had occupied this site. Abhorrent as the prospect may seem to the modern environmentally sensitive mind, a steelworks would likely have replaced the siding had the former council not protested to the McKell Labor Government of New South Wales that Rozelle was already an over-industrialized over-populated suburb starved of parkland.

Accordingly retention and expansion (where possible and appropriate) of the current area of open space at Callan Park is vital. This area is a veritable 'lung' for the whole complex of Sydney's inner west suburbs. Systematic conservation of this area would be an initial major step towards recapturing land that was intended as open space in the late 19th century but later lost to encroachments of railways, power stations, timber mills, shipyards, and other industries, the most famous of which was Sydney Harbour Collieries' Balmain coalmine.

4. Native Vegetation:

While the site includes excellent examples of formal 19th and 20th century landscaped gardens, it also includes a wide range of plant life that is not only indigenous to the Sydney Basin and Cumberland Plain, but also integral to the diet, pharmacopeia, and livelihoods of Indigenous inhabitants. Recent re-regeneration of native species, such as those at Callan Point, should be encouraged and vigorously extended.

As historian Grace Karskens points out in her splendid newly published history of Sydney, *The Colony*, the accelerated removal of forage during Sydney's early colonial period compelled the progressive dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

5. Oyster Bed and Mangrove Regeneration:

In the earliest colonial period, oysters and other shellfish flourished in Iron Cove. The only local visible legacies of this richness are remnants of middens that have survived on the foreshore. In 1817, emancipist government architect, Francis Greenway, oversaw convicts harvesting the oyster beds of Iron Cove for later use as lime in the mortar applied to the brickwork of the iconic St Matthew's Church at Windsor. Shells would have been used as mortar in the construction of numerous other early colonial buildings - thus was the fate of the Port Jackson oyster.

The recent re-growth of oysters on foreshore rockeries and harbour walls has been enthusiastically welcomed and this regenerative process should be allowed to continue. The regeneration of salt-marsh grasses and mangroves, as well as other indigenous plant life (*e.g.* Warragul), on the western foreshore of Iron Cove (as well as elsewhere on the Parramatta Rover) should be pursued with equal vigour on the Cove's western foreshore.

For the reasons cited previously, the planting of indigenous grass on Callan Point is a welcome initiative and, for the benefit of future generations, the regenerative momentum needs acceleration.

6. Conservation and Refurbishment of 20th Century Buildings:

The significance of surviving 19th century buildings on the Callan Park site is already comprehensively documented and widely recognised. The heritage of these items is also protected. More vulnerable to change or demolition are structures dating from the interwar and post-war eras, of which many are derelict: the conservation and suitable adaptive reuse of these items requires close and urgent consideration.

Probably the best example of a newer building that is deserving of conservation, refurbishment and reuse is that which accommodated Wards 17 and 18 of the former Rozelle Hospital. The NSW Government Architect designed this building in the late 1950s. It was completed and occupied in the early 1960s. Sleek and elegant, this item stands in need of sensitive restoration. Other buildings should be expertly assessed for their heritage significance and those recommended for retention be suitably adapted for compatible reuse.

Author: John Williams, on behalf of H-GOLD.