



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

24 May 2019

Mr Todd Kitson
Senior Manager, Parklands & Public Domain
Sydney Olympic Park Authority
Level 8, 5 Olympic Boulevard
Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127

Dear Mr Kitson

**SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARKLANDS - FUTURE DIRECTIONS 2030 FRAMEWORK:
AILA NSW SUBMISSION**

Thank you for providing AILA NSW with the opportunity to submit a response to the initial framework for the Future Directions 2030 Strategy.

Firstly, SOPA is to be congratulated on this initiative. The landscapes of the Sydney Olympic Parklands are rightly recognised both here in Australia and across the world as a fine exemplar of what is meant by a successful and enduring Olympics legacy.

The maturing of the Parklands - almost 20 years after the Olympics - and the rapidly changing urban and demographic context in which they are set marks this as a timely review and update of the values, vision and strategy that underpinned its original conception.

Given the outline nature of the material you have issued to us for initial comment on the strategy we have focused our feedback on high level commentary, understanding that we will also have the opportunity to comment in more detail later, when the draft document is placed on exhibition.

This submission therefore touches on six areas of initial response:

- Values – reiterating the core values of the park as the foundations for future directions
- Context – addressing the changing urban and population setting of the Parklands
- Usage – recognising and responding to the evolution in the park's use and enjoyment
- Vision – the inspiration and aspiration at the heart of the future directions
- Objectives – the framework for carrying the vision forward
- Funding – the vehicle for delivering the strategy over the coming years.

While we recognise Sydney Olympic Parklands as an integrated urban precinct that combines landscape, built form and infrastructure, the focus of this response is centred primarily on the landscape and public realm aspects of the strategy framework.

VALUES

We assume that the significant values of the Parklands will form a core part of the introduction to the strategies as the bedrock of the Future Directions strategy. In particular AILA would highlight the following:

- The critical value of the Parklands as an internationally recognised and award-winning integrated urban parkland system
- The vital role of the Parklands in demonstrating and acting as a case study in post -industrial landscape remediation



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

- The central role that the Parklands play in reconnecting Sydney to the culture, heritage and ecology of its most populated urban riparian corridor on the Paramatta River
- The significant contribution of the Parklands to addressing climate change resilience and adaptation in the Sydney metro area
- The Parklands vital role in conserving, interpreting and promoting Sydney's rich Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal cultural heritage and narrative line
- The pivotal role the parklands play in education and awareness raising at all levels across the themes of natural systems, cultural heritage and recreation
- The unique recreation appeal and diversity that the Parklands offer the local, district and regional population of Sydney.

CONTEXT

The setting and context of the Parklands is central to its role, appeal and success. The presentation rightly emphasises the connectivity of the Parklands to its surroundings -and the community have also expressed a desire for better connectivity - yet the illustrations and diagrams seem to show these connections mostly stopping and starting at the boundaries, with little indication of the wider destinations and drivers of visitation in the surrounding suburbs.

It would be helpful if the Future Directions strategy could include a map and some basic commentary on the broader context and critical relationships of the Parkland's to its context (Parramatta River, Duck River, Meadowbank, Shepherds Bay, Rhodes etc.)

From the perspective of a policy context, the Future Directions strategy provides an ideal opportunity to embrace some of the key urban and landscape planning initiatives recently developed by the Greater Sydney Commission, The Government Architects Office of NSW, the NSW Department of Planning and Environment and RMS. Of particular relevance would be the following:

- The Central River City, as part of the Three Cities concept (GSC) – drawing out and promoting the unique river landscape values of the Parklands
- Greener Spaces, Better Places Policy (GANSW) – integrating best practice in the delivery of benchmark green infrastructure and urban design practice
- Green, Blue and Ochre Grid (GSC/GANSW) – playing a leading role in the implementation of this ecological and recreational systems network at a local and subregional level
- 5 Million Trees program (DP+E) – strengthening the local application and educational values of this vital climate responsive and biodiversity initiative
- Everyone Can Play (DP+E) – broadening the accessibility and diversity of play within the Parklands in liaison with the surrounding LGAs.

The opportunity to promote active transport and address obesity-related health issues within the Future Directions Strategy can also draw on related policy such as Transport Future 2056 (TfNSW) and Sydney's Walking and Cycling Future (RMS).

USAGE

The brief summary of population growth in the user catchment of the Parklands and the nature of current usage illustrated in the presentation tell an interesting story. Most noteworthy are the following:

Population Growth Surrounding the Parklands

SOPA has been highlighting the implications for the Parklands of this significant growth for some years now with respect its own carrying capacity. The continuation of an active engagement with the surrounding Councils will be critical in maintaining the Parklands values and appeal (a challenge that is similarly faced by Centennial Parklands).



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

Local, district and regional users should all be welcome, but the Parklands cannot and should not be seen as replicating or making good any shortage of local open space in the surrounding suburbs.

Weekend and Week Day Use

The statistic which reveals that 82% of visits are at weekends, with 40% of those being visitors living nearby begs some interesting questions about the Parklands' role in people's day-to-day lives:

- Are there identifiable reasons as to why so few of the overall numbers are weekday users? Are issues such as small flexible spaces on the boundaries for short duration visits, short local walking circuits, promotion of recreation opportunities, wayfinding or other factors at play here?)
- Can it be established what numbers of visitors are people just passing through the Parklands (ie cycle commuters)? These are frequently high users in parks en-route to major destinations. With a major cycle link across the river, one would imagine this to be an increasing user type.

VISION

The Vision as illustrated and described in the presentation seems to lack aspiration or inspiration; some more poetic and engaging language (and/or ideogram) would help to cement the Vision in people's minds.

While the concept of 'Three Parks, One Parkland' has real merit this would perhaps be better presented as the framework for the Objectives rather than a Vision. In the same vein, compelling Visions are typically bold statements of purpose and intent, so perhaps the removal of the word 'if' would render the statement a little less equivocal.

Finally, the presentation describes this as a 'new vision'. The successful delivery of the Parklands, their ongoing popularity and burgeoning international recognition suggests that the original Vision is a compelling and enduring one. It might be worth restating that Vision and identifying what aspects of that statement require refinement and refocus as the Parklands' approach their 20 year anniversary.

OBJECTIVES

The four themes selected for the Objectives provide a sound substructure to the 'One Parklands – Three Parks' framework. They also reflect many of the issues and opportunities raised during stakeholder engagement.

The benefits of creating three 'precincts' within Parklands provides the opportunity for greater clarity of site-specific aspects of each precinct, such as uses, management, legibility and communication. The challenge of this approach (which the presentation hints at) is in avoiding 'hard boundaries' that can undo the sense of the greater whole. This relates both to the physical boundaries of each precinct and to the uses within them (ie a sports precinct will still contain play spaces, if evidently smaller and less embellished than in a general leisure precinct).

The ability to draw together the threads of what elements should be common to all precincts and what elements distinctive to a given precinct will assist in ensuring the whole remains greater than the sum of the parts.

Likewise, the desire to increase diversity of recreational opportunity, while laudable in itself, should be measured with a clear-eyed perspective on what is distinctive about this place; an integrated strategy that will ensure the Parklands do not replicate recreational activities that are or should be available in local parks in the wider district (see commentary above on usage and partnership with local Councils).

FUTURE FUNDING

Finally, AILA believes that the success of any Future Directions strategy can only be realised through a secure funding program over the lifetime of the strategy. The return on investment created by a commitment from



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

NSW Treasury to provide a consistent and sustainable funding strategy for the Parklands will include reduced costs in health care for mental and physical wellbeing, reduced private vehicle dependency (through a site specific active Transport Strategy) and contribution to improved local air quality and climate amelioration.

We hope this submission is of assistance in progressing this important document. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide any clarifications.

Sincerely

Mark Tyrrell
NSW Chapter President
Australian Institute of Landscape Architects